THE RING
THE BEST OF 2024
DUBOIS
KING ARTUR
USYK
JUNTO
BAM
96TH ANNUAL THE RING AWARDS

THE RING

CONTENTS JANUARY 2025

26 THE BEST OF 2024
WE PULLED FROM 12 MONTHS OF UNDISPUTED THRILLS TO GATHER NOMINEES FOR THE RING MAGAZINE'S 96TH ANNUAL YEAR-END AWARDS

28 FIGHTER OF THE YEAR
32 FIGHT OF THE YEAR
36 KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR
40 COMEBACK OF THE YEAR
42 UPSET OF THE YEAR
44 ROUND OF THE YEAR
46 PROSPECT OF THE YEAR
48 TRAINER OF THE YEAR
50 EVENT OF THE YEAR
52 WOMEN'S BOXING AWARDS

54 ALL BUSINESS, ALL PERSONABLE
GABRIELA FUNDORA IS THE NICEST STONE-COLD ASSASSIN YOU'LL EVER MEET
By Thomas Gerbasi

56 ARTUR BETERBIEV VS. THE GREATS
"KING ARTUR" IS TODAY'S TOP 175-POUNDER, BUT CHAMPS FROM THE PAST MIGHT'VE HAD SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THAT
By Anson Wainwright

62 THE BEST FIGHT CARD EVER?
IN FEBRUARY 2025, BOXING FANS WILL GET AN OLD-SCHOOL BATTLE ROYALE BETWEEN PROMOTIONAL RIVALS IN TITLE FIGHTS GALORE
By Michael Montero

68 TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY
THE SAD DEMISE OF ISRAEL "MAGNIFICO" VAZQUEZ
By Nigel Collins

72 MY FIRST TIME
REVISITING THREE KEY MOMENTS IN A BOXER'S LIFE
By Paulie Malignaggi

DEPARTMENTS

2 OPENING SHOTS
6 COME OUT WRITING
8 RINGSIDE
By Doug Fischer
12 STEVE'S SOAP BOX
By Steve Kim
14 BERNSTEIN ON BOXING
By Al Bernstein
16 BY THE NUMBERS
18 RING RATINGS PACKAGE
76 THE FACE OF BOXING
By Thomas Hauser and Wojtek Urbanek
78 COMMISSIONER'S CORNER
By Randy Gordon
80 BEHIND ENEMY LINES
By Anson Wainwright
82 WORLD BEAT
92 RELAUNCH IN RIYADH
96 FIGHTLINE

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY KRONKAAART .COM

OPENING SHOTS

In a moment that tells a larger story, William Zepeda (left) and Tevin Farmer give and take simultaneously during their lightweight battle on the Riyadh Season "Latino Night" card on November 16. Farmer would score a knockdown in the fourth round, but Zepeda surged back to win a split decision that easily could've gone the other way.

Sarah Stier

OPENING SHOTS

Tyson Fury (right) was more serious and focused than he'd been in his first fight against unified heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk, but even the best version of "The Gypsy King" couldn't overcome the Ukrainian's combination of iron will and impeccable skill in the rematch, which Usyk won by unanimous decision.

Richard Pelham

COME OUT WRITING

WELCOME BACK

I was surprised and thrilled to receive my December 2024 print edition of The Ring in the mail recently. I have been a subscriber of The Ring for over 45 years. While settling for reading the e-edition of The Ring was better than no Ring Magazine, it was not nearly the same as the print magazine. Thank you to His Excellency Turki Alalshikh for bringing back the print edition. It is also noticeable that the quality of the magazine was better than ever, with the thicker pages and ink quality. I am looking forward to enjoying many more years of The Ring in print.

Rick Flanagan
Ballwin, Missouri

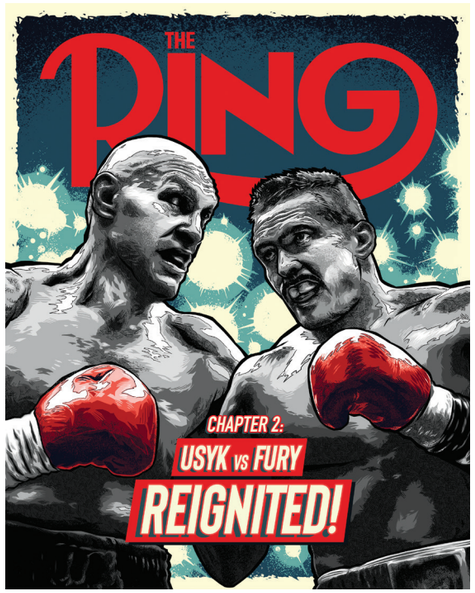
JACK REISS

My name is Thomas Taylor. I am a professional boxing referee from the state of California. I am writing to you in hopes of drawing your attention to the recent retirement of an outstanding professional boxing referee, Jack Reiss.

Jack's career spans over 26 years and 1,152 professional boxing bouts, which is more than any referee in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. The notable fights Jack has officiated and his accomplishments are countless, but to name a few....

1. **Terence Crawford vs. Israil Madrimov**
2. **Deontay Wilder vs. Tyson Fury I**
3. **Errol Spence Jr. vs. Shawn Porter**
4. **Multiple Vasiliy Lomachenko fights**
5. **Multiple Gennadiy Golovkin fights**
6. **Refereed over 100 title fights**
7. **Has been inducted into three boxing halls of fame**
8. **Refereed throughout the United States as well as Germany, Australia, Japan, Russia, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, China, United Kingdom, Chile and Thailand.**

Jack has shared the ring with numerous world titleholders throughout his career and has earned the respect of not only his fellow boxing officials, but that of fighters, their trainers, sanctioning bodies (IBF, IBO, WBA, WBC and WBO) as well as commissions around the world. If you ask Jack what his biggest accomplishment has been in the sport, he will tell you he shared the ring with 2,304 fighters and every one of them went home safe to their families. An incredible feat in a very dangerous sport. Speaks volumes to his good judgment, empathy and knowledge of the rules and regulations of one of the most difficult sports to officiate.



The print edition of The Ring returned with the issue previewing Usyk-Fury II.

But that is not all Jack is about. His love of boxing and wanting to leave the sport better than it was when he first got in drew him to start his own professional boxing referee training course, Sole Arbiter. The course consists of three days of deep study into film, referee mechanics, rules, regulations and best practices for referees. It is for current professional boxing referees looking to get better and elevate their proficiency by learning from one of the best to have ever been in the ring. The most recent course was held in Las Vegas over Labor Day weekend (2024) and saw the biggest turnout in Sole Arbiter's existence. Besides his referee training course, Jack is also a certified Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC) trainer. This consists of him traveling all over the world, meeting with the boxing commissions and conducting referee training seminars.

Jack was born in Brooklyn, New York, and in his teens came to California to visit a friend and never looked back. He spent his professional life as a firefighter in the city of Los Angeles, rising to the rank of captain for 19 years, and retired after 31 years of service. In his retirement from the ring, he is transitioning into an Instant Replay Official, a professional boxing judge, and will be ringside for years to come.

It's not often we get to honor a living legend in a sport where most people, fighters and officials stay well past their prime. Jack's respect for the sport led him to leave a bit early, rather than too late and put any fighter in harm's way. Speaks to his integrity and love of the sport.

I ask you to please consider a full-page article to honor one of the best to have ever been in the ring and one who certainly has left the sport better than when he came in.

Respectfully,
Thomas Taylor

Editor's reply: Jack Reiss is absolutely worthy of at least a full-page article in this publication. Heck, I'd love to have him contribute as a regular columnist addressing referee- and boxing official-related subjects. But for the time being, your letter is a fine tribute. RING

WRITE TO THE RING!

Email comeoutwriting@gmail.com or use this address: P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209

THE RING

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JANUARY 2025

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RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

LET'S CELEBRATE A NEW ERA

Icons and influencers attended The Ring's relaunch part in Riyadh.

Welcome to the first print issue of 2025.

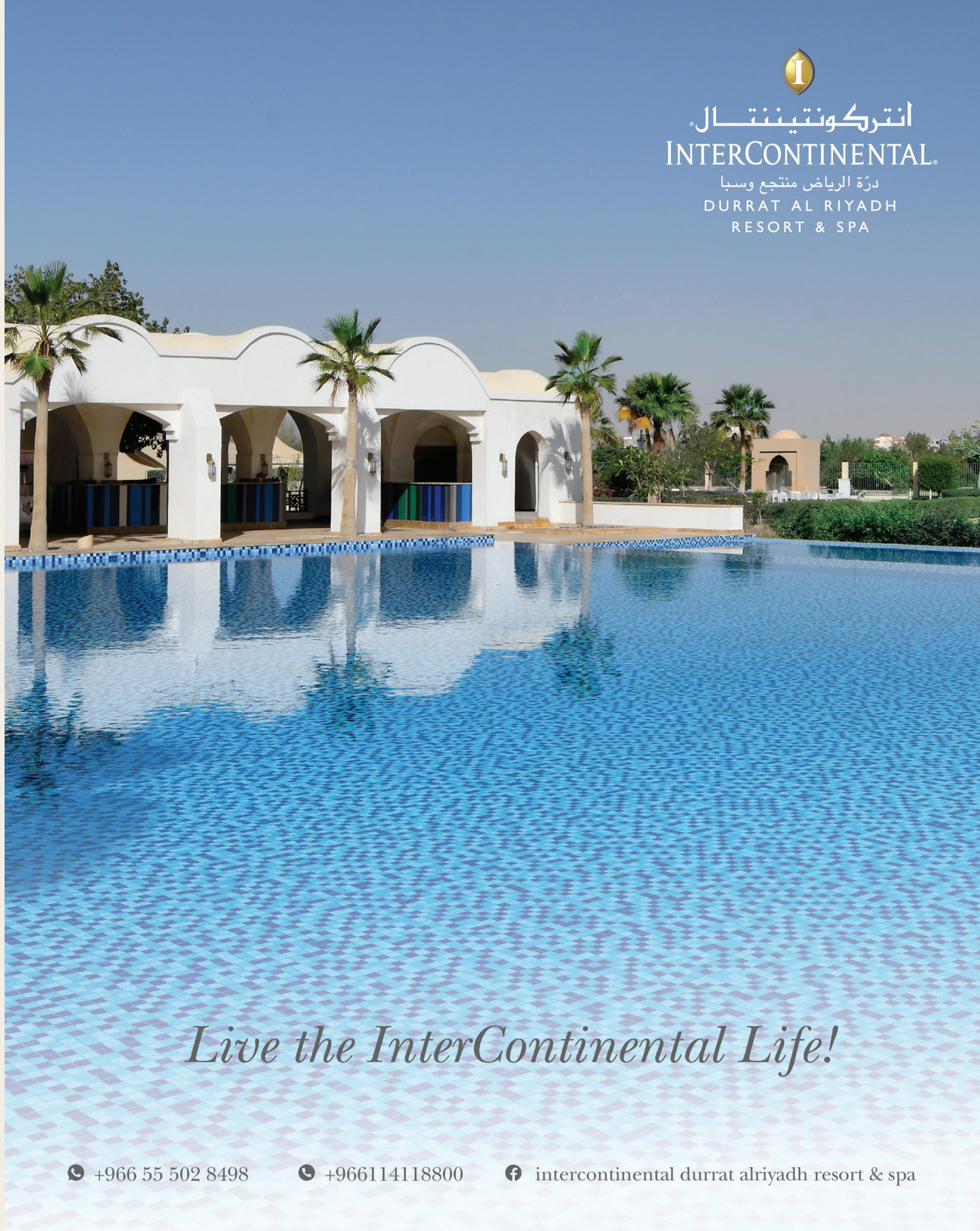
We normally begin the new year with the Fighter of the Year on the cover of an issue that showcases all of the winners of our annual awards for the previous year, including Fight, KO, Round, Upset, Comeback, Trainer, Prospect and Event of the Year. Featuring the Fighter of the Year on the cover is a tradition that goes back several decades, but we're kicking off 2025 with a cover illustration that includes multiple candidates for the prestigious honor that dates back to 1928.

While most of us knew who the frontrunner for Fighter of the Year was the moment his masterful craft and uncommon grit enabled him to once again outpoint the most talented heavyweight giant of this era, the official winner – as well as the recipients of the other 2024 Ring Magazine awards – would not be officially announced until January 11, the night of a lavish, star-studded gala held at an iconic venue in London.

Think of it as The Ring's answer to the Academy Awards. And while this elegant black-tie celebration honoring the best of 2024 has yet to happen as of press time, we know it will be a very special event and we will provide full coverage in our February issue, which will continue the long tradition of featuring the Fighter of the Year on the cover.

The January 11 event wasn't the only classy gala put on by the new owner of The Ring. On December 19, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, just two days prior to the big heavyweight championship rematch held at Kingdom Arena, the magazine received a relaunch dinner party that surpassed any event honoring the publication since its 75th anniversary celebration held on March 8, 1997, in Atlantic City.

The Ring's diamond anniversary was attended by Muhammad Ali and archrivals Joe Frazier and Ken Norton, a dozen former champions of the 1950s and '60s, as well as many of the stars of the '80s and '90s, including Sugar Ray



Leonard and Thomas Hearns.

The event announced the greatest fighter of the last 75 years (Sugar Ray Robinson) and presented Ring championship belts to many of the legends in attendance. I remember reading about it and wishing I could have been there.

"When's the next time they'll have a celebration like this one?" I wondered. "The 100th anniversary?"

I had no clue that I would be affiliated with The Ring by its centennial, let alone Editor-In-Chief of the publication, but there would be no 100-year celebration. The pandemic had a part in that, as did some haters who worked under the publication's previous owner.

However, two years after the print magazine ceased publishing, The Ring received a party worthy of its long history and significance to the sport at VIA Riyadh, a luxury retail and event development (basically a giant fancy-schmancy mall).

Giant red Ring logos, neon signs of "The Ring" and "The Bible of Boxing," and hundreds of vintage cover images from several decades adorned an enormous event hall that hosted more than 500 boxing luminaries, including Roberto Duran, Lennox Lewis, Oscar De La Hoya, Wladimir Klitschko, Naseem Hamed and Carl Froch. Those hall of famers were joined by Amir Khan, Carl Frampton, Oleksandr Usyk, Tyson Fury, Jai Opetaia, Daniel Dubois, Chris Eubank Jr., celebrities such as Cuba Gooding Jr. and Mario Lopez, and several very trendy looking Gen-Z influencers I did not recognize.

All sang the praises of The Ring during red carpet interviews with major media outlets such as DAZN, TNT Sports and BoxNation, which took place before the dinner portion of the gala began.

I was asked to give a speech on stage during the dinner, oh, maybe two days before the event. I was told I had five minutes of a tight two-hour program produced and live-streamed by DAZN. No problem, I can do five minutes in my sleep. But the event organizers asked me to present my speech in writing the night before. That was a mistake. I'm incapable of writing succinctly.

This is not exactly what I said (because I freestyled a bit behind the podium, piggy-backing off of a wonderful Ring reminiscence from event host Michael Buffer, which drove the producers crazy), but this is what I wrote:

Tonight we celebrate a new era of the Ring Magazine, which is a celebration of boxing – past, present and future.

Looking out into the audience, I see representatives of every facet of the sport and the industry – the boxers, trainers, managers, matchmakers, members of the media, as well as representatives from the sanctioning bodies, promotional companies and networks. Along with the fans, you ARE boxing.

When you open an issue of The Ring, we want you to see yourselves and every aspect of boxing. But most importantly, we want you to see the SPORT in its purest form – no politics, no bullshit – as well as its rich and fascinating history.

For more than a century, The Ring has chronicled every era that has not only defined the sport but shaped society – The Roaring Twenties, The Great Depression, World War II, The Baby Boom, the TV Age, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Era, on into my lifetime, which began in the 1970s.

Muhammad Ali introduced me to boxing, but Sugar Ray Leonard and his rivalry with Roberto Duran transformed me into a lifelong fan.

Duran is here tonight. And so I bow to him and his peers of the '70s and '80s. They are the reason I love boxing. I see other fighters in the audience, some of whom I covered as a member of the media during the 1990s and 2000s. They're modern legends now. Wladimir Klitschko. Oscar De La Hoya. Special thanks to The Golden Boy for keeping this magazine alive through its 100th birthday.

It wasn't just an honor to cover De La Hoya and his peers – Ike Quartey, Felix Trinidad, Shane Mosley, Fernando Vargas – it was a pleasure. Like the Four Kings of the '80s, they didn't just make for big events, they made for great fights. My longtime colleague Steve Kim and I talk about this all the time; we were lucky to come up when we did.

It was a hell of a ride.

And the journey continues for The Ring, amazingly back in print in 2025. If you want to know what to expect of this new era of Ring Magazine, I proudly invite you to pick up a copy of our December 2024 special, which previews Saturday's heavyweight championship rematch.

Feel the weight and the quality of the paper, appreciate the variety of the art, note the new departments, but most importantly READ the articles. The Q&As that were done with Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury are not your average interviews, because these aren't average individuals. After reading these articles, you'll understand how special and outstanding they are – not just as champions and elite-level competitors, but as human beings – and you'll realize that we're in for another special night on Saturday.

Also, keep this in mind: As good as this December issue is, it's only 50% of where we will be. His Excellency Turki Alalshikh has an ambitious vision and plan for this historic publication, and we are proud and honor-bound to accept this challenge for the betterment of a true boxing institution and to better serve the sport we love.

I was politely scolded by one of the stage coordinators for using up 10 minutes once I got back to my table, but everyone I spoke to that night (including Len Blavatnik, who owns DAZN) congratulated me for speaking from the heart.

If you want to watch DAZN's two-hour production, just go to YouTube and type in RIYADH SEASON: RING MAGAZINE RELAUNCH GALA; it will pop up on the channels belonging to DAZN Boxing, Top Rank Boxing, Matchroom Boxing and TNT Sports Boxing.

December issue in hand, the Editor-In-Chief promised continued excellence from The Ring in 2025.

Beltmann

NOTES FROM RIYADH

- This was my first time in Riyadh (first time in Saudi Arabia, first time visiting the Middle East). It's a modern, fairly westernized city where English is prevalent in most areas. I experienced no more "culture shock" there than I have when covering boxing in Tokyo, Mexico City or London.
- I didn't have much time to explore Riyadh while there (six days). On top of racing to finish this issue, I was kept busy with company meetings and interviews for an in-the-works Ring Magazine Podcast series. Bob Arum and Roberto Duran were among my interviews. They're as sharp as ever, recalling every detail of events that took place more than 50 years ago and before I was born.
- Chatted with Amir Khan, who I hadn't seen in many years, while at the relaunch gala. First thing he told me: "Man, you've put on weight!" Yes, Amir, 20+ pounds. You've given me my motivation for my New Year's resolution.
- Steve Kim and I hosted a live "watchalong" during the later part of the Usyk-Fury II pay-per-view broadcast on DAZN. Watching a clean feed (no commentary or graphics), Kim and I scored the fight wide for Usyk.
- I finally met content creator Showbizz The Adult.
- I also met the Neffati Brothers (Jamel and Jamil), influencers who began the infamous World Freak Fight League. Their first (and only) promotion was headlined by the two of them (who look like lightweights) taking on a British weightlifting behemoth named Eddie Hall in an MMA cage match. (Google it, YouTube it, it's insane.) They introduced themselves and told me they really liked my speech at the gala. I told them that they were the "future" that I mentioned at the start of it. Not the "freak fight" stuff. I was talking about the interest in learning more about boxing sparked by the classic Ring covers they saw at the gala and by rubbing shoulders with the legends of the sport.

STEVE'S SOAPBOX

By Steve Kim

For a Boxing Writer, Living in Los Angeles During the Early 2000s Provided a Front-Row Seat to the Rise of a Living Legend

Pacquiao's unparalleled boxing accomplishments earned the Filipino phenom worldwide fame.

It was no surprise when it was announced that Manny Pacquiao was part of the 2025 International Boxing Hall of Fame class. If there were ever anyone who was a no-brainer this year, it was "Pac-Man." Chances are he was a unanimous selection, and anyone who didn't put a check mark next to his name should have their voting privileges revoked.

It was a career that began on January 22, 1995, as Pacquiao stopped Edmund Ignacio in the Philippines as a junior flyweight. It ended on August 21, 2021, as he lost a WBA welterweight title bout to Yordenis Ugas in Las Vegas.

His record is 62-8-2 (39 KOs) in a career that saw him hold a world title in four separate decades. It's an incomprehensible feat, which speaks not just to his talent but his sustained greatness as a prizefighter. But this alone doesn't speak to the magnitude of Pacquiao and what he meant to the sport of boxing and the Philippines.

Imagine being the Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan of your country. It may seem like hyperbole, but Pacquiao truly meant that much to his country. His fights were not just sporting events, but in many ways a national holiday where Filipinos across the world gathered to watch their hero. Pacquiao fought not just for himself, but for millions of his countrymen. It was reported that when he fought, the crime rate would be zero on those days.

I saw firsthand the fervor and maniacal loyalty that he engendered in his people. During his training camps at Wild Card Boxing Club in Los Angeles (which became a tourist spot largely because of the presence of Pacquiao), throngs would gather on a daily basis just to catch a glimpse of their idol as he drove to and from the parking lot of the strip mall that was attached to Freddie Roach's gym on Vine Street.

Pacquiao's popularity extended well beyond his own people. He was the rare boxer in modern pop culture who broke through to the mainstream, truly an international star who became a household name in America. Nike had its own line of Pacquiao apparel, same as it had for Kobe Bryant.

While he was already a world champion by 1998 (after he stopped Chatchai Sasakul for the WBC flyweight title), Pacquiao burst into the consciousness of stateside fans when he was placed on the pay-per-view undercard of Oscar De La Hoya's bout against Javier Castillejo in June of 2001. He was placed opposite the highly regarded IBF junior featherweight titlist, Lehlo Ledwaba. In what was an eye-opening performance, Pacquiao blitzed Ledwaba in six rounds. It was more than just winning a title; Pacquiao stole the show on this night at the MGM Grand when fans had really come to see "The Golden Boy."

It was clear that Pacquiao was a player. But he wasn't quite yet a star. What's oftentimes forgotten is that his next several bouts came on undercards (supporting the likes of Fernando Vargas or future nemesis Floyd Mayweather Jr., or in a slot on the Lennox Lewis-Mike Tyson bill in Memphis) and stay-busy bouts back home in the Philippines. Pacquiao was biding his time for the next big opportunity.

Where he clearly stamped himself as an elite fighter was his dominance of Marco Antonio Barrera in November of 2003. Coming into this contest, Barrera was considered to be among the top three or four boxers in the world, pound-for-pound. But on this night at the Alamodome in San Antonio, he was no match for the Filipino whirlwind. Barrera was stopped in 11 one-sided rounds, conceding his Ring Magazine featherweight championship to Pacquiao.

This would be the first encounter in Pacquiao's rivalries with the Mexican trio of Barrera, Erik Morales and Juan Manuel Marquez, all three of whom are Hall of Famers. Just think about this: We are now in an era of boxing where there are very few real rivalries and even fewer multi-fight duels between elite fighters. Pacquiao engaged in three of them during his prime.

Among that quartet, he was the only one who faced all the others. During a series of contests that spanned from 2003 to 2012, Pacquiao earned the moniker of "Mexicutioner" as he compiled a 6-2-1 overall mark against his three nemeses. It has to be noted that the last bout of this memorable period saw Pacquiao get knocked out cold, face-first, in his fourth and final clash with Marquez.

While those chapters are a central part of the Pacquiao story, "Pacmania" truly exploded after his clash with the man whose undercard he'd so memorably lit up years before. In 2008, coming off a victory over David Diaz for the WBC lightweight belt, Pacquiao and promoter Bob Arum rolled the dice in moving up two weight classes to face the much bigger De La Hoya.

When this bout – which really was the brainchild of venerable HBO broadcaster Larry Merchant – was announced, many lampooned the idea, calling it a physical mismatch. Which is exactly what it turned out to be. A weight-drained De La Hoya was simply overwhelmed by the speed and angles of Pacquiao, who struck him at will. The defeated Olympian retired on his stool (and subsequently from his career) after eight rounds.

After this, covering Pacquiao was like covering a rock star. You were no longer just covering a boxer or athlete. I recall vividly during my days at MaxBoxing that Brian Harty (then our videographer) and I would get access to one day of Pacquiao's private training at Wild Card. He would customarily arrive about an hour or so late, and then he'd put on two hours of the most frenetic workout you will ever see. We understood that we were watching a generational talent ply his trade.

The interviews with Manny afterward were pretty vanilla, but any Pacquiao content was gold for us. He basically created an economy for a whole generation of boxing media – and eventually any content creator. Boxing scribes of the past had Muhammad Ali and Deer Lake. Well, I had Pacquiao and Wild Card.

Make no mistake about it: Pacquiao's run from 2008 to 2012 (which also included the likes of Ricky Hatton and Miguel Cotto on his ledger) was legendary, and a special time for boxing. Ask any fans about this period, and they will have specific memories that they will never forget. Chances are we'll never see a run like that ever again from any fighter.

After his knockout loss at the hands of Marquez, Pacquiao was able to rebound and string together some victories against recognizable names. But what still lingered was the unfinished business against Mayweather. They had been circling one another for about five years, and the inability to consummate this bout was to many observers symbolic of the ills of the boxing business.

They finally met in 2015 for what was a rather anticlimactic affair; Mayweather won a 12-round decision. Truth be told, this wasn't one of Manny's shining moments. His popularity was never quite the same after the loss.

To his credit, Pacquiao moved forward and notched a series of solid wins, and he showed he had one last great effort in him as he upset Keith Thurman, who is a full decade younger than Pacquiao, in 2019 for the WBA welterweight title. Two years later, Pacquiao lost to Ugas, and a couple of months after that, he announced his retirement from the ring.

There is speculation that the 45-year-old Pacquiao may return to the ring. Personally, I hope not. He's already given us more than enough memories. RING

By Al Bernstein

The Year To Come

It is fairly well-known that I will never predict a winner for a boxing match I'm announcing. I just don't believe in it. I am perfectly happy, however, to make other predictions, and I have a spate of them for the year 2025. Consider this your guidepost to the coming year in boxing.

The Beterbiev-Bivol rematch headlines the first "mega" pay-per-view card of 2025.

The first three months of this year will be the most exciting first quarter of any year for boxing fans in decades.

The February 22 card headlined by Artur Beterbiev vs. Dmitry Bivol will set a new standard for promoters. That show goes seven deep in exciting and meaningful fights. There are four title fights plus three more important bouts in different weight divisions.

At some point this year, Nick Ball will be in a fight that it looks like he absolutely can't win … and he will win.

Naoya Inoue will fight Junto Nakatani by year's end. It will be an epic battle in the ring and the biggest fight Japan has ever had. I think it will also resonate well in the rest of the world.

The over/under is three on how many major fighters in the prime of their careers will post on social media that they are retiring … and unretire within two weeks to announce a new fight.

Alexis Rocha and Raul Curiel will fight a rematch and it will be just as good as the first one.

The 140-pound division will continue to produce great fights, with champions changing at an alarming rate. The division has more depth than any other in boxing.

Andy Cruz will go from 4-0 to title contention in the lightweight division by the end of the year. He is a unique talent and he's fighting experienced foes.

We will see virtually every important match we yearn for in women's boxing this year. I know that because women's boxing does that every year. It is remarkable.

The Carlos Adames vs. Hamzah Sheeraz title match will be a catalyst to more excitement in the middleweight division this year. It is a fascinating fight.

Sandy Ryan will be a champion again before the year ends.

By the end of 2025, Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez will already have the resume necessary for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. He will just need to take care of that pesky detail of finishing the last 10 years or so of his career.

The new Grand Prix tournament for young prospects around the world – recently announced by the WBC (with the backing of Turki Alalshikh) and focusing on the featherweight, junior welterweight, middleweight and heavyweight divisions – is going to be a fascinating and successful innovation.

Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano will complete their trilogy with yet another exciting match, and it will be remembered as one of the best trilogies in boxing history.

Al says women's boxing will deliver again in 2025, including Taylor-Serrano III.

Taylor: Sarah Stier

The over/under is 2 1/2 on how many A-side fighters are saved by referees in major fights this year.

Adrien Broner will not attend any of my music shows in Las Vegas.

The next wave of heavyweights – Agit Kabayel, Martin Bakole and Lenier Pero – will all have a productive year in 2025.

Promotional companies like MVP, Overtime, Salita Promotions, Red Owl Boxing and others will continue to make important contributions to boxing with shows that provide opportunities to fighters on all levels.

The Brandon Figueroa-Stephen Fulton rematch will be as exciting as the first fight. For that to happen, though, Fulton must rebound from recent struggles. Otherwise, the pressure from Figueroa will eat him up.

Though the resources of Turki Alalshikh and his Riyadh Season promotional group were the primary force for getting Eddie Hearn and Frank Warren together, they will continue to work together even without the Saudi involvement. It has been beneficial to both of them and they have worked together well.

Finally, the easiest prediction for the year. No matter what happens in the sport in 2025, some sports media pundits (especially likely in America) will say loudly and decisively that boxing is dead. They will, of course, be wrong. The sport is often damaged, sometimes by self-inflicted wounds, but it doesn't die. I assure you there will be prediction columns like this one being written about the year 2026. So, enjoy boxing in 2025. As always, it will be interesting.

Hall of Fame broadcaster Al Bernstein has been the voice of boxing on ESPN, then Showtime. He now announces the Big Time Boxing USA series on DAZN and hosts his own YouTube show.

BY THE NUMBERS:

EZZARD CHARLES

by Don Stradley

Ezzard Charles (1921-1975) was nearly unmatched in terms of sheer boxing skill. Unfortunately, he found himself overshadowed by more colorful fighters, including some he defeated. Here is his story by the numbers.

3 Victories Over Archie Moore »

How can a man beat the legendary Moore three times and go virtually uncredited? The answer is probably due to their fights taking place in the years before Moore was a media sensation. Charles, too, was not as well-known as he'd later be. Moreover, the three Charles-Moore fights took place in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and Cleveland. Had they taken place in New York, the country's loudest media horn at the time, they would've generated much more interest.

Charles took the first bout, held at Forbes Field in May of 1946, by decision. As the Associated Press reported, Charles "belted Moore … around for 10 rounds like he owned him." Their second bout in May of 1947 was another 10-round decision win for Charles. As if to put the rivalry behind him, Charles stormed out for their third bout in January of 1948 and scored an impressive eighth-round knockout. Charles' deciding punch, a roundhouse right to Moore's head, landed with such impact that the sound was heard above the din of 8,334 fans. "I was certain," said one reporter, "that something broke either in Archie's head or Ezzard's right hand, maybe in both places."

2 Wins over Charley Burley »

The old-timers said Burley was the greatest fighter to never win a title. Yet Charles, as a mere 20-year-old, surprised the experts in May of 1942 when he scored a 10-round decision over Burley in Pittsburgh. The pair met again a month later. Charles won again. It was even easier the second time. Granted, Charles was a middleweight at that point and Burley was a welterweight, but Burley had still been a 6-1 betting favorite going into their first bout.

Burley's manager tried to explain the losses by saying his fighter had been sparring with too many heavyweights, particularly Curtis "Hatchetman" Sheppard. These rugged gym sessions had left Burley in a tenderized state for Charles. Regardless, the wins over Burley showed the public that Charles was a young virtuoso on the way up.

1 Tragedy in the Ring »

Sam Baroudi died from injuries sustained in a 1948 bout with Charles. Baroudi was 21. Ironically, a fighter named Newton Smith had died after being KO'd by Baroudi six months earlier.

1 Victory over Joe Louis »

In the wake of Louis' retirement from boxing, Charles emerged as the recognized heavyweight champion in 1949. Not surprisingly, Louis returned to fight for his old title in a widely hyped Yankee Stadium bout in September of 1950. Louis needed money, and the sagging boxing business needed Louis. But at 36, with several years of partying and hard living behind him, Louis couldn't handle his young and clever opponent. Charles won by a 15-round decision.

History remembers this contest as a lopsided victory for Charles, but some of the rounds were competitive. The problem was that for every punch Louis landed, Charles landed two in return. The other problem was that the public was rooting for Louis and never quite forgave Charles for beating their idol. Though the win cemented his claim to the heavyweight championship, Charles spent the remainder of his career as something less than a fan favorite.

2 Bouts with Rocky Marciano »

Charles lost twice to Marciano in 1954, but his brave effort in the first bout returned him to the good graces of fans. It was a hard-fought 15-round decision win for Marciano in Yankee Stadium, the only time "The Rock" went the full 15-round distance. Marciano won their second bout by knockout, but not before Charles opened a horrible cut on Rocky's nose.

4 Bouts with Jersey Joe Walcott

The Charles-Walcott series has often been discredited as a snoozefest, but it featured a couple of milestones. Their first bout was for the vacant NBA heavyweight title, which Charles won by 15-round decision in Chicago's Comiskey Park in June of 1949. Charles became the new champion after Joe Louis' nearly 12-year reign, which was big news at the time. Charles won their second bout in Detroit, but in 1951 the series took an unexpected turn. With a sneaky left hook, Walcott scored a stunning knockout of Charles at 0:55 of Round 7. Charles was suddenly an ex-champion. The win made Walcott, at 37, the oldest man to win the heavyweight title, which was also a big deal and a distinction he'd hold for many years.

In June of 1952, Walcott and Charles met for the fourth and final time. After 15 closely fought rounds at Philadelphia's Municipal Stadium, Walcott was the winner by a shade. The bout had been a dull but grueling contest, and many were uncertain of the winner. Of 38 boxing writers polled at ringside, 21 thought Charles had won, while 17 thought Walcott had done enough to keep his title. The series was tied at two wins apiece, but neither the press nor the public clamored for a tiebreaker.

5 Wins over Joey Maxim »

Promoters never got the message that Charles had Maxim figured out. After their fifth meeting, Maxim kept his sense of humor. "That's the fifth time Charles has taken the decision from me," Maxim said. "Next time, I guess I'll have to take a club to him."

121 Fights »

His final record was 95-25-1 with 52 knockouts. But consider that before his losses to Marciano, his record was 85-10-1, compiled against the best of his day, and you cannot deny that Ezzard Charles was a special fighter. He may have had a dual personality, but it seems that both sides of him were damned good in the ring.

2 Personalities »

It was common throughout Charles' career to say he had a dual personality. He could be a vicious puncher who wasn't afraid to foul a man, but he could also be overly cautious.

As a publicity stunt prior to Charles' second bout with Marciano, a psychologist was hired to attend both camps and report his findings. Dr. J.J. Moreno said that Charles "is the dreamer type … in his dreams he is a mighty, invincible fighter who sweeps all before him in a reckless, savage, destructive fashion. In the ring, however, he loses the spontaneity he has in his dreams." Moreno deemed Charles as simply too sensitive to be a truly effective fighter.

Many believed Charles' conscience was bothered by the Baroudi fight, or that he was distracted by the jeers he heard in the aftermath of beating Louis. His trainer, Ray Arcel, once said Charles was "like a good racehorse who won't run for you." RING

Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of December 21, 2024 • By Brian Harty

The 24-year-old "Bam" continues to climb the P4P rankings.

POUND FOR POUND: Calm and deliberate, Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez just oozes the confidence of a fighter who knows exactly who he is. The punch selection is always appropriate, nothing is wasted and he's always on a solid foundation, planted for power. If you try to take the side door to escape the pressure, he's already there to meet you. This was the narrative as the Ring/WBC junior bantamweight champion forcefully dissected Pedro Guevara over the course of three rounds, flooring him once with a straight one-two and then again with a right uppercut for the stoppage. The finishing punch was a triumph in itself, as Rodriguez, a southpaw, stood squarely in front of Guevara and waited for him to signal a left hook, then in one fluid move slipped past the Mexican's front foot, closed the distance and turned so that the punch had all the rotation of an orthodox power uppercut. It wasn't a shocking end result, given that Bam was a huge favorite to win, but it is another page in the now-voluminous case for Rodriguez's unfolding greatness. The Ratings Panel voted to promote him to No. 6 on the list, putting him above Canelo Alvarez.

Oleksandr Usyk remained on the throne at No. 1 after his repeat victory over Tyson Fury.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Even though it sometimes looked like the fight was in slow motion and they should be standing in a Tokyo cityscape, knocking over buildings, the energy expended by Gilberto Ramirez and Chris Billam-Smith in their unification bout was incredible. Both men were limp with exhaustion at the end of the mutual pummeling, which WBA titleholder "Zurdo" won by unanimous decision to collect Billam-Smith's WBO belt. As a result, Ramirez (No. 3 going into the fight) took the No. 1 spot from the tough-as-hell Billam-Smith, who dropped to No. 2.

The aforementioned fight moved Noel Gevor Mikaelyan into the No. 3 position, but he was removed a week later for inactivity. Brandon "Bulletproof" Glanton came in at No. 10 when everyone moved up.

Cheavon Clarke (No. 9) dropped out after taking the first loss of his career against undefeated Dominican Leonard Mosquea, who seized the European title by split decision and entered the list at No. 10 after Glanton gained a rank.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: The threat of Imam Khataev being the next big thing at 175 is now a bit more visible, as he replaced Ali Izmailov at No. 10 after a TKO of Yunior Menendez. The 9-0 (9 KOs) Khataev, who won bronze representing the Russian Olympic Committee at the 2020 games, floored the previously unbeaten Cuban in the first round and forced the stoppage in the third.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: No. 1-rated Jaime Munguia looked like he was back to his old ways in the second fight of his post-Canelo comeback, walking through punches from unheralded Frenchman Bruno Surace to deliver a methodical stoppage. But then Surace stepped back, took a look, loaded up his right hand and knocked Munguia out with a single punch. The shocking upset tumbled Munguia down to No. 8 on the list, just below his new French neighbor. Lester Martinez (No. 10) was pushed out.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: Meiirim Nursultanov (No. 6) was removed due to a year of inactivity, creating a vacancy for European champion Denzel Bentley to enter at No. 10.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Charles Conwell was promoted from No. 9 to No. 8 after his characteristically languid style of power boxing finally caught up to Gerardo Vergara (unrated) in Round 8.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: No. 3-rated Jose Ramirez lost a unanimous decision to undefeated contender Arnold Barboza (unrated at the time), and Ramirez looked bad enough that the panel decided to drop him from the list entirely. Barboza didn't blow anyone away either, but the win was good enough for him to re-enter at No. 9.

In his first defense of the IBF belt he took from Subriel Matias in June, **Liam Paro** passed it to **Richardson Hitchins** after losing a split decision (although the one card in the Australian's favor was bizarre). Hitchins rose from No. 8 to No. 4 while Paro slipped from No. 3 to No. 5.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Continuing to gain ground with every fight, Keyshawn Davis advanced from No. 7 to No. 5 after a second-round knockout of Gustavo Lemos (unrated), who was completely out-everythinged and went down three times due to the 2020 Olympian's surgical punching skills. Davis says he has his eyes on Denys Berinchyk's WBO title next.

William Zepeda (No. 3 last month) threw almost 800 punches in his 10-round fight against Tevin Farmer in mid-November, and that's pretty far below his average, believe it or not. Perhaps that explains how Farmer was able to find a brief opening for a left cross that floored Zepeda in the fourth round (though nothing can explain why Farmer's trunks were covered with pockets). Zepeda quickly got up and would go on to win by the closest of split decisions, and the panel made adjustments to reflect the competitiveness of the fight: Farmer entered at No. 10, replacing Sam Noakes, and Zepeda was lowered a notch to No. 4.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: O'Shaquie Foster was at No. 2 and Robson Conceicao was No. 8 going into their first fight back in July, and that's where they remained after Conceicao was gifted a split decision win and the Ratings Panel branded it a robbery. In the hastily ordered rematch four months later, Foster regained his WBC title by SD in a fight that was legitimately close. He rose to No. 1 and the Brazilian got a promotion to No. 7 for his efforts.

Oscar Valdez went down three times at the hands of WBO titleholder Emanuel Navarrete and was knocked out by a left hook to the liver in Round 6. The fight was a rematch mostly made for the fans after the first encounter in 2023 saw Navarrete win a wide decision even while fighting with an injured hand. The healthy version had no problem bossing Valdez around the ring with rangy jabs and heavy, long-armed hooks and uppercuts, and with the win he took back the No. 1 spot from Foster. Valdez dropped out of the list from No. 3 and Mexico's Eduardo Hernandez came in at No. 10.

Hector Luis Garcia was last seen in a split-decision loss to Lamont Roach in November 2023, so he was removed from his No. 7 slot and Albert Bell returned to the list for probably the seventh time.

FEATHERWEIGHT: Hoping to leave his loss to Nick Ball last June behind, No. 7-rated Raymond Ford moved up to 130 pounds, where he looked good in a decision win over Orlando Gonzalez. With Ford's departure, undefeated Californian Omar Trinidad, who is scheduled to face Mike Plania next, entered at No. 10 (Stephen Fulton was a close runner-up).

Rafael Espinoza, who took the WBO title from Robeisy Ramirez in December 2023 by majority decision, won the rematch after Ramirez surrendered in the sixth round, saying that damage to his right eye was causing double vision. Ramirez rose from No. 5 to No. 2 and Ramirez fell to No. 9 from No. 7.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Unrated Shabaz Masoud scored an upset split decision over Liam Davies (No. 5), but it was the kind of performance to make you wonder why he was ever the underdog. Masoud's quickness and sharpness, both in stab-and-slip attacks and choppy inside fighting, was a level above the more linear approach of his opponent. As a result, Davies fell out of the ratings and Masoud broke in at No. 6.

Dennis McCann had a spot reserved on the Usyk-Fury 2 card but failed a drug test, so he was kicked off the list and undefeated Mexican Sebastian Hernandez took his place at No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Alexandro Santiago's attempt to rebound from a very rough night against Junto Nakatani in February 2024 ended with a majority decision loss to inexperienced 21-year-old Jose Calderon Cervantes. Santiago (No. 8 going in) was ejected from the list and Jeyvier Cintron entered at No. 10.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: There was a suggestion on the panel to completely remove Pedro Guevara, who was rated No. 7 as he walked to the slaughterhouse to face division champ Bam Rodriguez, but the former 108-pound titleholder kept his foot in the door with a drop to No. 10. As a bonus stat, Rodriguez is currently the leader on CompuBox's "Power Connect Percentage" list at a blistering rate of 48.9, just above Gervonta Davis. He also leads the overall connect rate at 39.5%.

FLYWEIGHT: No. 1-rated Sunny Edwards seemed ready to give up in the corner after getting ragdolled in the opening round by Galal Yafai (No. 9), and it was weird because

the insecurity almost seemed like a lingering wound from the undeserved boos Edwards received after his last fight ended with a cut-induced technical decision over Adrian Curiel in Arizona. Yafai continued to push the pace and overwhelmed his former sparring mate for a stoppage in the sixth round, getting a promotion to No. 4 as a reward. Edwards, perhaps his heart not in it anymore after recent events and a punishing loss to Bam Rodriguez in December 2023, announced his retirement soon afterward. He leaves the game with a record of 21-2 (4 KOs), having won the IBF title by outboxing Moruti Mthalane in 2021 and successfully defending the belt four times. With his departure, Tobias Reyes entered the ratings at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: No. 5-rated Elwin Soto dropped to No. 10 after fighting to a split draw against fellow Mexican Moises Caro (unrated).

Darkhorse-in-the-making Thanongsak Simsri crept up another notch, from No. 7 to No. 6, with a split decision win over former WBO titleholder Masataka Taniguchi in Japan.

STRAWWEIGHT: South African Siyakholwa Kuse debuted in the ratings at No. 10, replacing Joey Canoy, after a majority decision win over Zimbabwe's Beaven Sibanda, who took the first loss of his fledgling career.

And finally, there was the championship fight between two men who together weigh less than Oleksandr Usyk but provided a massively entertaining example of why smaller fighters deserve more attention (and money). Oscar Collazo, rated No. 1 going into the fight, held the WBO title and a perfect record. His opponent, whether you call him Thammanoon Niyomtrong or Knockout CP Freshmart, also undefeated, was the WBA incumbent with 12 consecutive defenses in a reign that started in 2016. With him being rated No. 2 in the division ratings, the vacant Ring Magazine championship was also on the line for the first time in the Riyadh Season "Latino Night" co-feature to Ramirez vs. Billam-Smith. Collazo was brilliant, controlling the action with a comprehensive arsenal, dismantling his opponent piece by piece. Niyomtrong was knocked down for the first time – seemingly in disbelief during his entire trip to the canvas – by a counter right hook in Round 6. Starting to fold from all the body shots he was absorbing, he went down again from another right hook in the seventh, and it was a left uppercut that closed the show about 30 seconds later. The Thai fighter slipped to No. 3, and Collazo cemented his place in Puerto Rico's long tradition of producing giants.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1 **OLEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
2 **NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 28-0-0 (25 KOs)
3 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
4 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
5 **DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
6 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
7 **CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
8 **GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 30-0-0 (28 KOs)
9 **JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)
10 **DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** IBF, WBO — Kazakhstan • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 **HAMZAH SHEERAZ** — U.K. • 21-0-0 (17 KOs)
3 **CARLOS ADAMES** WBC — Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 **ERISLANDY LARA** WBA — Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
5 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** — U.K. • 34-3-0 (25 KOs)
6 **ETINOSA OLIHA** — Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
7 **KYRONE DAVIS** — U.S. • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)
8 **TROY ISLEY** — U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
9 **SHANE MOSLEY JR.** — U.S. • 22-4-0 (12 KOs)
10 **DENZEL BENTLEY** — U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBA — U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
2 **ISRAIL MADRIMOV** — Uzbekistan • 10-1-1 (7 KOs)
3 **BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** IBF — Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
4 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** WBC, WBO — U.S. • 21-1-1 (13 KOs)
5 **VERGIL ORTIZ** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
6 **SERHII BOHACHUK** — Ukraine • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)
7 **TIM TSZYU** — Australia • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
8 **CHARLES CONWELL** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
9 **JESUS RAMOS** — U.S. • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)
10 **BRIAN MENDOZA** — U.S. • 22-4-0 (16 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JARON ENNIS** IBF — U.S. • 33-0-0 (29 KOs)
2 **EIMANTAS STANIONIS** WBA — Lithuania • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
3 **MARIO BARRIOS** WBC — U.S. • 29-2-1 (18 KOs)
4 **DAVID AVANESYAN** — Russia • 30-5-1 (18 KOs)
5 **BRIAN NORMAN JR.** WBO — U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
6 **GIOVANI SANTILLAN** — U.S. • 33-1-0 (18 KOs)
7 **SHAKHRAM GIYASOV** — Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
8 **ALEXIS ROCHA** — U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
9 **JIN SASAKI** — Japan • 18-1-1 (17 KOs)
10 **RAUL CURIEL** — Mexico • 15-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBO — U.S. • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)
1 **DEVIN HANEY** — U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
2 **JACK CATTERALL** — U.K. • 30-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **ALBERTO PUELLO** WBC — Dom. Rep. • 23-0-0 (10 KOs)
4 **RICHARDSON HITCHINS** IBF — U.S. • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 **LIAM PARO** — Australia • 25-1-0 (15 KOs)
6 **SUBRIEL MATIAS** — Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)
7 **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
8 **ANDY HIRAOKA** — Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
9 **ARNOLD BARBOZA** — U.S. • 31-0-0 (11 KOs)
9 **JOSE VALENZUELA** WBA — U.S. • 14-2-0 (9 KOs)

Bentley: James Chance; Conwell: Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C **OLEKSANDR USYK** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO — Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
1 **TYSON FURY** — U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
2 **DANIEL DUBOIS** IBF — U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
3 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 35-3-0 (23 KOs)
4 **ZHILEI ZHANG** — China • 27-2-1 (22 KOs)
5 **AGIT KABAYEL** — Germany • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
6 **MARTIN BAKOLE** — Congo • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
7 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** — U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
8 **FILIP HRGOVIC** — Croatia • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)
9 **FABIO WARDLEY** — U.K. • 18-0-1 (17 KOs)
10 **EFE AJAGBA** — Nigeria • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C **JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF — Australia • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
1 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** WBA, WBO — Mexico • 47-1-0 (30 KOs)
2 **CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** — U.K. • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
3 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 19-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 **RICHARD RIAKPORHE** — U.K. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
5 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** — France • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
6 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
7 **RYAN ROZICKI** — Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
8 **YAMIL PERALTA** — Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
9 **BRANDON GLANTON** — U.S. • 20-2-0 (17 KOs)
10 **LEONARDO MOSQUEA** — France • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C **ARTUR BETERBIEV** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO — Russia • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
1 **DMITRY BIVOL** — Russia • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
2 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 29-0-0 (24 KOs)
3 **JOSHUA BUATSI** — U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
4 **ANTHONY YARDE** — U.K. • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)
5 **ALBERT RAMIREZ** — Venezuela • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
6 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
7 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** — Ukraine • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
8 **DAVID MORRELL** — Cuba • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
9 **WILLY HUTCHINSON** — U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)
10 **IMAM KHATAEV** — Russia • 9-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO — Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
1 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** — France • 28-0-0 (23 KOs)
2 **OSLEYS IGLESIAS** — Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
3 **DIEGO PACHECO** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (18 KOs)
4 **CALEB PLANT** — U.S. • 23-2-0 (14 KOs)
5 **WILLIAM SCULL** IBF — Cuba • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6 **VLADIMIR SHISHKIN** — Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
7 **BRUNO SURACE** — France • 26-0-2 (5 KOs)
8 **JAIME MUNGUIA** — Mexico • 44-2-0 (35 KOs)
9 **EDGAR BERLANGA** — U.S. • 22-1-0 (17 KOs)
10 **ERIK BAZINYAN** — Canada • 32-1-1 (23 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA — U.S. • 30-0-0 (28 KOs)
2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** IBF — Ukraine • 18-3-0 (12 KOs)
3 **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBC — U.S. • 22-0-0 (10 KOs)
4 **WILLIAM ZEPEDA** — Mexico • 32-0-0 (27 KOs)
5 **KEYSHAWN DAVIS** — U.S. • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
6 **DENYS BERINCHYK** WBO — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (9 KOs)
7 **RAYMOND MURATALLA** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
8 **FRANK MARTIN** — U.S. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
9 **ANDY CRUZ** — Cuba • 4-0-0 (2 KOs)
10 **TEVIN FARMER** — U.K. • 33-7-1 (8 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO — Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
2 **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** WBC — U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
3 **ANTHONY CACACE** IBF — Ireland • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
4 **LAMONT ROACH** WBA — U.S. • 25-1-1 (10 KOs)
5 **JOE CORDINA** — U.K. • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
6 **ROBSON CONCEICAO** — Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
7 **EDUARDO NUNEZ** — Mexico • 27-1-0 (27 KOs)
8 **ALBERT BATYRGAZIEV** — Russia • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
9 **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 36-2-0 (32 KOs)
10 **ALBERT BELL** — U.S. • 26-0-0 (9 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ANGELO LEO** IBF — U.S. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
2 **RAFAEL ESPINOZA** WBO — Mexico • 26-0-0 (22 KOs)
3 **NICK BALL** WBA — U.K. • 21-0-1 (12 KOs)
4 **REY VARGAS** — Mexico • 36-1-1 (22 KOs)
5 **LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ** — Mexico • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)
6 **BRANDON FIGUEROA** WBC — U.S. • 25-1-1 (19 KOs)
7 **MIRCO CUELLO** — Argentina • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
8 **BRUCE CARRINGTON** — U.S. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
9 **ROBEISY RAMIREZ** — Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
10 **OMAR TRINIDAD** — U.S. • 17-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO — Japan • 28-0-0 (25 KOs)
1 **MARLON TAPALES** — Philippines • 39-4-0 (20 KOs)
2 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** — Uzbekistan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
3 **SAM GOODMAN** — Australia • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
4 **LUIS NERY** — Mexico • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
5 **ALAN PICASSO** — Mexico • 31-0-1 (17 KOs)
6 **SHABAZ MASOUD** — U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
7 **TJ DOHENY** — Ireland • 26-5-0 (20 KOs)
8 **ELIJAH PIERCE** — U.S. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
9 **RAMON CARDENAS** — U.S. • 25-1-0 (14 KOs)
10 **SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 18-0-0 (17 KOs)

RING RATINGS ANALYSIS THROUGH FIGHTS OF DECEMBER 21, 2024

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 JUNTO NAKATANI WBC
Japan • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)

2 RYOSUKE NISHIDA IBF
Japan • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 SEIYA TSUTSUMI WBA
Japan • 12-0-2 (8 KOs)

4 YOSHIKI TAKEI WBO
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)

5 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)

6 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
Puerto Rico • 22-3-0 (13 KOs)

7 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 27-3-0 (19 KOs)

8 DAVID CUELLAR
Mexico • 28-0-0 (18 KOs)

9 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-1 (19 KOs)

10 JEYVIER CINTRON
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JESSE RODRIGUEZ RING, WBC
U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)

1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ WBA
Argentina • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)

2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 44-4-0 (28 KOs)

3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-3-1 (16 KOs)

4 PHUMELELE CAFU WBO
South Africa • 11-0-3 (8 KOs)

5 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)

6 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 42-5-1 (28 KOs)

7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)

8 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 58-6-1 (47 KOs)

9 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)

10 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 42-5-1 (22 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 ANGEL AYALA IBF
Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)

2 KENSHIRO TERAJI WBC
Japan • 24-1-0 (15 KOs)

3 SEIGO YURI AKUI WBA
Japan • 21-2-1 (11 KOs)

4 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

5 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 22-1-0 (15 KOs)

6 RICARDO SANDOVAL
U.S. • 25-2-0 (18 KOs)

7 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 41-4-0 (35 KOs)

8 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA WBO
U.S. • 8-1-0 (6 KOs)

9 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 40-6-1 (27 KOs)

10 TOBIAS REYES
Argentina • 16-0-1 (15 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 MASAMICHI YABUKI IBF
Japan • 17-4-0 (16 KOs)

2 SHOKICHI IWATA WBO
Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)

3 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)

4 ADRIAN CURIEL
Mexico • 24-6-1 (5 KOs)

5 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 27-2-1 (19 KOs)

6 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)

7 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 25-2-0 (20 KOs)

8 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)

9 ERICK ROSA
Dom. Rep. • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

10 ELWIN SOTO
Mexico • 21-3-1 (13 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C OSCAR COLLAZO RING, WBA, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (8 KOs)

1 MELVIN JERUSALEM WBC
Philippines • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 PEDRO TADURAN IBF
Philippines • 17-4-1 (13 KOs)

3 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 25-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 YUDAI SHIGEOKA
Japan • 9-1-0 (5 KOs)

5 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

6 PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 43-2-0 (27 KOs)

7 WILFREDO MENDEZ
Puerto Rico • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)

8 HASANBOY DUSMATOV
Uzbekistan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)

9 DIANXING ZHU
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)

10 SIYAKHOLWA KUSE
S. Africa • 8-2-1 (4 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

ENNIS: @MARK ROBINSON/MATCHROOM; BARIO: AL BELLO ANADOLU

Women's Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of December 21, 2024 • By Diego Morilla

Shadasia Green celebrates after narrowly beating Melinda Watpool.

POUND-FOR-POUND: The mythical list of the best fighters in the world had few reasons to be changed in this period. Proposals were made for Ring welterweight champion Lauren Price to break into the Top 10, but not enough voters were convinced yet. That situation will change when Price takes on Natasha Jonas in a potential fight of the year candidate that will definitely cause some movement in the lower part of the pound-for-pound list, where Jonas currently sits at No. 9. The fight is scheduled for March 7.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Shadasia Green's win over Melinda Watpool failed to convince the panel when asked whether Green deserved to become the No. 1 contender to Savannah Marshall's crown by moving past Franchon Crews-Dezurn. Watpool is a middleweight who may have taken the fight to test the waters at 168, thus Green's victory was not enough to take the No. 1 position. Our current No. 4, Mary Casamassa, stayed active with a win over Adriana Dos Santos.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: Melinda Watpool's loss to Shadasia Green at super middleweight did not affect her No. 2 middleweight rating at the time. But later, the more active Desley Robinson gave the panel reason to demote Canada's Watpool and promote the Aussie contender to No. 1. The real question in the middleweight debate was the name of the replacement for Jesikah Guerra, who was dropped out due to inactivity. With only a handful of qualified names in the mix, the panel picked Australia's Chloe Chaos as the new No. 5.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Oshae Jones' win over Femke Hermans was probably good enough to have been declared as a vacant Ring title championship if we had dropped Ema Kozin earlier due to inactivity. But with the presence of the once-dominant and always dangerous Cecilia Braekhus in the mix, we better wait for a worthier fight to take place. Instead, Jones reached the No. 1 position by virtue of her win, while the battle-

tested Hermans dropped to No. 3 as Kozin was finally dropped when she became one-year inactive on Dec. 18. Taking the vacant spot at No. 5 was France's Priscilla Peterle.

WELTERWEIGHT: **Lauren Price's** stoppage win over **Bexcy Mateus** and Natasha Jonas' dominant victory over Ivana Habazin did little to alter our Top 5, but it did serve as an appetizer for the upcoming Price-Jonas clash on March 7 with the Ring belt on the line.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: They aimed to put the lingering questions from their first fight to bed once and for all. They didn't do that, as many observers felt the decision was unfair, but Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano gave us another blood-soaked battle of wills that turned out to go ever so slightly for the Irish legend, who remained our champ. Serrano expressed her desire to return to featherweight after the fight, and thus she remains unrated at 140. Later in the month, England's Samantha Worthington scored a stay-busy win that nonetheless helped her get a bump to No. 2 as Oshin Derieuw and Christina Linardatou were dropping out due to inactivity. Elisabeth Oshoba and Elhem Mekhaled were picked to be our new Nos. 4 and 5, respectively.

LIGHTWEIGHT: After three straight fights at 140, it's time for us to declare Katie Taylor's inaugural Ring championship vacant. A crowded field of top-notch talents such as Caroline Dubois, Beatriz Ferreira, Terri Harper, Rhiannon Dixon and possibly Alycia Baumgardner could be vying for the historic belt very soon.

FEATHERWEIGHT: With Jennifer Miranda apparently headed for 130, we had to free up a spot for a deserving talent at 126 pounds. Tiara Brown was proposed, but the panel picked Raven Chapman to enter at No. 5. Sarah Mahfoud's win over Danila Ramos failed to earn the Danish fighter any momentum to move past Germany's Nina Meinke.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: A brief return to the ratings by Argentina's Micaela Lujan took place after her win over Mexico's Debora Gomez, displacing fellow South American titlist Clara Lescurat. But that achievement was short-lived, as Mexico's Asley Gonzalez avenged her compatriot when she returned to action against Mary Romero and claimed the No. 5 spot from Lujan.

FLYWEIGHT: Former inaugural Ring champ Marlen Esparza returned to action with a win over the always dangerous Arely Mucino. Esparza was probably eager to reclaim the No. 1 position from her nemesis, Gabriela Alaniz, but the Argentine held onto her rating when Houston's Esparza missed the weight for her clash against Mucino by two pounds. This being the second time in a row that Esparza has missed weight, the panel decided not to reward her lack of discipline and kept her at No. 2.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: With the undisputable No. 1 contender in the division, Jessica Nery Plata, already inactive for one year and entering an extended hiatus due to her foray into motherhood, the division was in dire need of a revamp. Add to that the exit of Argentina's Leonela Yudica and Mexico's Tania Enriquez due to inactivity, and the minor upset by Canada's Sara Bailey over the always tough Anabel Ortiz, and the scramble is inevitable. Even though Bailey-Ortiz took place a bit north of the 108 limit, they both campaign at lower weights and were thus rated at No. 3 for Bailey and 5 for Ortiz, with the legendary Lourdes Juarez reentering the fold at No. 4.

STRAWWEIGHT: Germany's Sarah Bormann scored a solid win over Argentina's Jennifer Meza, but it wasn't enough to move past pound-for-pound talent Yokasta Valle. But a different story took place in the lower tier of the Top 5, where Yadira Bustillos' exit due to inactivity led to the inclusion of Argentine trial horse-turned-KO-artist Sol Baumstarh at No. 5.

ATOMWEIGHT: A new champ is born! Germany's Tina Rupprecht defeated Japan's Eri Matsuda to become the first-ever woman to lift the Ring Magazine belt for the lightest division in all of boxing. With Matsuda dropping to No. 2, it was time to bring Sumire Yamanaka to the top position. And with everyone else moving up one spot to fill in for the new champ, Mexico's Esneidy Rodriguez Olmos was picked to become the new No. 5. She didn't stay there for too long, however. A few days later, Mexico's Rodriguez Olmos defeated Sana Hazuki in a rematch and was immediately promoted to No. 4. RING

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**CLARESSA SHIELDS** U.S. • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
2	**KATIE TAYLOR** Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
3	**CHANTELLE CAMERON** U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	**AMANDA SERRANO** Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
5	**DINA THORSLUND** Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	**GABRIELA FUNDORA** U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
7	**YOKASTA VALLE** Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
8	**ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
9	**NATASHA JONAS** U.K. • 16-2-1 (9 KOs)
10	**MIKAELA MAYER** U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- **C** **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** RING, IBF
  U.K. • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 9-2-0 (2 KOs)
- **2** **SHADASIA GREEN** WBO
  U.S. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **LANI DANIELS**
  New Zealand • 11-2-2 (1 KO)
- **4** **MARY CASAMASSA**
  U.S. • 6-0-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **CITLALLI ORTIZ**
  Mexico • 4-1-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **1** **DESLEY ROBINSON**
  Australia • 9-3-0 (3 KOs)
- **2** **MELINDA WATPOOL**
  Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **3** **MAPULE NGUBANE**
  S. Africa • 13-9-3 (3 KOs)
- **4** **ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO**
  Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **CHLOE CHAOS**
  Australia • 5-1-1 (3 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C.** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **OSHAE JONES** IBF
  U.S. • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **2** **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
  Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
- **3** **FEMKE HERMANS**
  Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
- **4** **MARY SPENCER** WBA
  Canada • 9-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **PRISCILA PETERLE**
  France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **LAUREN PRICE** RING, WBA
  U.K. • 8-0-0 (2 KO)
- **1** **NATASHA JONAS** IBF, WBC
  U.K. • 16-2-1 (9 KOs)
- **2** **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
  U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
- **3** **SANDY RYAN**
  U.K. • 7-2-1 (3 KOs)
- **4** **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
  U.S. • 12-4-1 (5 KOs)
- **5** **IVANA HABAZIN**
  Croatia • 23-6-0 (7 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **1** **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
  U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON**
  U.S. • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **FLORA PILI**
  France • 10-0-0 (1 KO)
- **4** **ELIZABETH OSHOBA**
  Nigeria • 8-0 (5 KOs)
- **5** **ELHEM MEKHALED**
  France • 17-3 (3 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C.** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **CAROLINE DUBOIS**
  U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **2** **BEATRIZ FERREIRA** IBF
  Brazil • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **3** **TERRI HARPER** WBO
  U.K. • 15-2-2 (6 KOs)
- **4** **RHIANNON DIXON**
  U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **MAIRA MONEO**
  Uruguay • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **1** **DELFINE PERSOON**
  Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **2** **BO MI RE SHIN**
  South Korea • 18-2-3 (10 KOs)
- **3** **LEILA BEAUDOIN**
  Canada • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- **4** **JENNIFER MIRANDA**
  Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **MEA MOTU**
  New Zealand • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **AMANDA SERRANO** RING, WBA, WBO
  Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
- **1** **SKYE NICOLSON** WBC
  Australia • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- **2** **NINA MEINKE** IBF
  German • 19-3-0 (4 KOs)
- **3** **SARAH MAHFOUD**
  Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **4** **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
  Argentina • 32-5-3 (12 KOs)
- **5** **RAVEN CHAPMAN**
  U.K. • 9-1 (2 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **ELLIE SCOTNEY** RING, IBF, WBO
  U.K. • 9-0-0 (0 KOs)
- **1** **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
  Mexico • 24-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **2** **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
  France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
- **3** **NAZARENA ROMERO** WBA
  Argentina • 14-0-2 (8 KOs)
- **4** **ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ**
  Mexico • 17-2-1 (3 KOs)
- **5** **MIKIAH KREPS**
  U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **DINA THORSLUND** RING, WBC, WBO
  Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA**
  Mexico • 27-4-1 (4 KOs)
- **2** **CHERNEKA JOHNSON** WBA
  Australia • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **3** **NINA HUGHES**
  U.K. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **4** **SHURRETTA METCALF** IBF
  U.S. • 14-4-1 (2 KOs)
- **5** **MIYO YOSHIDA**
  Japan • 17-5-0 (0 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIZUKI HIRUTA** WBO
  Japan • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **2** **CARLA MERINO**
  Argentina • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
- **3** **GINNY FUCHS**
  U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
- **4** **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
- **5** **ASLEY GONZALEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 17-2 (7 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **GABRIELA FUNDORA** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **1** **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
  Argentina • 15-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **2** **MARLEN ESPARZA**
  U.S. • 15-2-0 (1 KO)
- **3** **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
  Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **ARELY MUCINO**
  Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
- **5** **IBETH ZAMORA**
  Mexico • 33-8-0 (13 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **EVELIN BERMUDEZ** IBF, WBO
  Argentina • 20-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **2** **KIM CLAVEL**
  Canada • 20-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **3** **SARA BAILEY** WBA
  Canada • 5-0 (0 KOs)
- **4** **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
  Mexico • 37-4-0 (4 KOs)
- **5** **ANABEL ORTIZ**
  Mexico • 34-7-0 (4 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **YOKASTA VALLE** WBC
  Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **SARAH BORMANN** WBO
  Germany • 19-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **ANABEL ORTIZ**
  Mexico • 34-7-0 (4 KOs)
- **4** **SOL CUDOS**
  Argentina • 9-0-2 (3 KOs)
- **5** **SOL BAUMSTARH**
  Argentina • 12-6-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

- **C** **TINA RUPPRECHT** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO
  Germany • 14-1-1 (3 KOs)
- **1** **SUMIRE YAMANAKA** IBF
  Japan • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **2** **ERI MATSUDA**
  Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
- **3** **YUKO KUROKI**
  Japan • 23-8-2 (10 KOs)
- **4** **ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS**
  Mexico • 9-0-1 (0 KOs)
- **5** **FABIANA BYTYQI**
  Czech Republic • 21-1-2 (5 KOs)

NurPhoto

THE BEST OF 2024

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

By Tom Gray

BRILLIANT FIGHTERS FROM BOTH ENDS OF THE WEIGHT SPECTRUM HAVE BEEN NOMINATED FOR THE RING'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS YEAR-END AWARD

ARTUR BETERBIEV

While Artur Beterbiev lost his distinction of being the only world champion in boxing with a 100% knockout ratio, he did accomplish his career dream of becoming the first undisputed light heavyweight champion in over two decades.

The Russian destroyer began the year by battering former super middleweight champion Callum Smith in Canada. Beterbiev was at his very best, dominating almost every round before securing a violent seventh-round stoppage to retain his then-unified championship. This marked the first time that Smith had failed to finish a fight.

From there, all attention turned to a matchup with WBA counterpart and fellow pound-for-pound entrant Dmitry Bivol. A superfight that once appeared dead due to high financial demands was brought back to life by Turki Alalshikh for the debut event of Riyadh Season 2024 on October 12.

And this showdown delivered.

Before the fight, conventional wisdom predicted Beterbiev by knockout or Bivol on points. Not for the first time, conventional wisdom was unreliable. In a brilliant tactical battle, Bivol boxed beautifully on the outside and used incredible footwork to put his man out of position. However, relying on years of experience in high-level combat and a turbocharged engine, Beterbiev began to close the gap in the second half and the pressure he applied was suffocating.

At the end of 12 rounds, fans and experts were divided over who deserved to walk away with the light heavyweight treasure trove. One judge scored it a draw, but the other two officials voted for Beterbiev, who left the Kingdom Arena as the undisputed champion by majority decision.

The pair will renew ties on February 22 at the very same venue.

OSCAR COLLAZO

Oscar Collazo is the ultimate little big man. In less than five years, this brilliant young Puerto Rican American has ascended to the very top of the strawweight division, and he's now on the cusp of pound-for-pound recognition.

The year 2024 was one to be celebrated. Collazo made three defenses of his WBO title, unified at 105 pounds and also claimed the inaugural Ring championship at strawweight. The scary thing is, at just 27 years old, we probably haven't seen the best of him.

In January, on the Jaime Munguia vs. John Ryder undercard, Collazo got himself involved in an entertaining scrap with game Nicaraguan Reyneris Gutierrez. The pair traded back and forth for the first two rounds, but the champ ended matters in the third with a pulverizing burst of combination work punctuated by a stiff right to the head.

Five months later, on Hall of Fame weekend in Verona, New York, Collazo was met with far tougher resistance by another Nicaraguan, Gerardo Zapata. In Round 2, the champ was shaken badly by a big right hand at ring center but managed to stay on his feet. Displaying the type of adaptability required at the top level, Collazo began boxing more following that moment of adversity and outpointed his opponent with room to spare.

However, the young hotshot saved the best for last. In a unification bout against long-reigning WBA titleholder and division No. 2 Knockout CP Freshmart, Collazo turned in a career-best performance. Unable to cope with his younger opponent's speed and accuracy, Freshmart was down three times and was stopped in the seventh round. The vacant Ring championship was also at stake in this fight.

DANIEL DUBOIS

A menacing heavyweight with thunderous power in both hands, Dubois was highly touted early in his career and viewed by many as the heir apparent to compatriots Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua. However, following setbacks against Joe Joyce (KO by 10) and Oleksandr Usyk (KO by 9), the colossal Londoner was suddenly labeled a "quitter."

Dubois did enter 2024 in good form, having emerged victorious in a battle of attrition with enigmatic American Jarrell "Big Baby" Miller (TKO 10) last December. The ebb and flow of that fight combined with Dubois' ability to overcome adversity convinced some – not all – skeptics that he'd turned a corner.

But despite coming off a career-best victory, Dubois was installed as the underdog when he faced unbeaten Croatian Filip Hrgovic in an interim IBF title fight in June. In a high-contact battle, the Englishman absorbed plenty of punishment, but he stayed in the hunt, cut Hrgovic with power punches and pulled off an impressive eighth-round stoppage.

The best was yet to come.

The 27-year-old Dubois was upgraded to full IBF titleholder status after Usyk was forced to relinquish that belt for agreeing to face Fury in their rematch. But while the door to another Usyk bout closed for Dubois, he suddenly found himself in an all-British superfight with Joshua at Wembley Stadium in September.

As the underdog once again, Dubois floored "AJ" three times in the first four rounds before knocking him out in the fifth with a perfect right-hand counterpunch. A U.K. attendance record of 96,000 fans watched the drama unfold live. Hyperbole to one side, this was one of the most sensational moments in British boxing history.

JUNTO NAKATANI

While Japanese phenom Junto Nakatani didn't post a career-defining triumph in 2024, what he did do was become a three-weight titleholder and rubber-stamp his pound-for-pound credentials. The 26-year-old southpaw contested three world title fights in eight months and scored three stoppage wins.

In February, Nakatani added the WBC bantamweight title to his flyweight and junior bantamweight crowns by decimating Alexandro Santiago. Santiago was coming off a dominant points win over the legendary Nonito Donaire and came to the ring confident of victory. The Mexican fighter didn't land a punch of significance and was taken out in six rounds following two heavy knockdowns.

In his first title defense, in July, Nakatani was matched against capable Filipino Vincent Astrolabio, who had prevailed in a title eliminator one year earlier. The challenger had also pushed super-tough Australian Jason Moloney to the wire in a bout for the vacant WBO crown before dropping a majority decision. Against Nakatani, Astrolabio lasted just 157 seconds, succumbing to a lung-bursting straight left to the body in Round 1.

In October, Nakatani took on the 76-1 Tasana Salapat. While the challenger's record was eye-popping, he'd never mixed with an elite-level puncher before and was fighting outside of Thailand for just the second time in his career. In his only defeat, Salapat was outpointed by future titleholder Takuma Inoue in 2018. Against Nakatani, in the very same city of Tokyo, he would experience far more discomfort. Two pulverizing knockdowns in Round 6 convinced referee Laurence Cole to wave the fight off.

In 2025, destiny could bring Nakatani and Naoya Inoue together for the biggest fight in Japanese boxing history.

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

JESSE RODRIGUEZ

“Bam” Rodriguez entered 2024 as a pound-for-pound entrant thanks to a TKO triumph over the then-unbeaten Sunny Edwards in a flyweight unification bout in December 2023.

Struggling to make 112 pounds, the Texas-based lefty decided to move up to junior bantamweight in pursuit of more gold. Even though he’d already held the WBC title in this weight class, Bam could scarcely have been more audacious in his choice of opponent for June 29 at the Footprint Center in Phoenix.

Over the past 12 years, Mexican boxing legend Juan Francisco Estrada had lost just one fight – to Srisaket Sor Rungvisai – and he’d avenged that setback on points. He was also the Ring Magazine/WBC champion at 115 pounds and his skillset was beyond reproach. While oddsmakers favored Bam’s youth and aggression, many felt Estrada’s experience and ring IQ would provide the 24-year-old boxer-puncher with a stern test.

In a superb showing, Bam displayed tactical superiority early, making Estrada work harder than he wanted to work and scoring with accurate punches. However, just when the curtain began to descend on Estrada’s Hall of Fame run, he dropped the challenger with a terrific right-hand bomb in Round 6. More embarrassed than hurt, Bam rose quickly and refused to engage anything other than forward gears. Estrada went beyond the call of duty to hold the younger man off but succumbed to a liver-bruising left to the midsection in the seventh.

Now closing in on the pound-for-pound top five, Bam took on former junior flyweight titleholder Pedro Guevara to finish out the year. Once again, he was dazzling, dropping the challenger twice en route to a brutal third-round TKO in Philadelphia.

OLEKSANDR USYK

By the end of 2023, Oleksandr Usyk had two decision wins over Anthony Joshua and a TKO 9 victory over Daniel Dubois. In those fights, Usyk gave away significant amounts of weight, height, reach and natural strength, yet he still prevailed. The Ukrainian hero’s intelligence, agility, speed and fighting heart carried the day.

In 2024, Usyk would face the biggest challenge of them all – twice.

Tyson Fury is listed at 6-foot-9, his reach is 85 inches, and he competes around the 270-pound mark. Usyk is 6-foot-3, his reach is 78 inches, and he always hits the scales at a shade over 220. And it’s not just that Fury is big – “The Gypsy King” is a seasoned and skilled warrior with a terrific ring IQ.

On May 18, 2024, at the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, both fighters were magnificent. Defending the WBC title, Fury retained tactical superiority from Rounds 3 through 7, stunning the unified Ring/IBF/WBA/WBO champion with perfectly timed uppercuts and unleashing a potent body attack. But no other active fighter responds better under fire than Usyk. He roared back to take command and score a knockdown in Round 9 before claiming a career-defining split decision triumph.

Usyk was only undisputed champion for a period of weeks before being forced to surrender the IBF title in order to face Fury in a contractually agreed rematch. However, this rivalry was now bigger than title belts and there was a genuine sense of destiny as fight time approached.

On December 21, at the same venue, the pair threw down to decide once and for all the greatest heavyweight of a generation. Again, Fury put forth a gallant effort and gave his nemesis all he could handle, but it wasn’t enough. Usyk banked eight rounds on all three scorecards to claim a 12-round unanimous decision.

ALSO NOTABLE:

Four-weight world champion **Canelo Alvarez** dominated both Jaime Munguia and Edgar Berlanga in super middleweight defenses, dropping his then-unbeaten foes en route to wide unanimous decision triumphs.

Englishman **Nick Ball** put a controversial draw against then-WBC featherweight champ Rey Vargas behind him to score a career-defining triumph over Ray Ford to lift the WBA version. Ball closed out the year with a thumping 10th-round stoppage over Ronny Rios.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

By John Evans

FROM ELITE-LEVEL TACTICAL BATTLES TO BRUTAL SLUGFESTS, 2024 WAS HIGHLIGHTED BY SEVERAL DRAMATIC NIP-AND-TUCK CONTESTS

1. RAYMOND FORD TKO 12 OTABEK KHOLMATOV

March 2, Turning Stone Resort Casino, Verona, New York

Heavy-handed Otabek Kholmatov wasn't used to opponents standing up to his thudding power shots. But Raymond Ford was different. After being hurt in the second and third rounds, Ford made the brave decision to take the fight to the previously unbeaten Uzbek.

Southpaw matchups generally don't produce the kind of fireworks that Kholmatov and Ford delivered during their 12-round battle for the vacant WBA featherweight title.

Ford absorbed more than his share of straight left hands, but the approach forced Kholmatov to work at an uncomfortable pace.

Despite being buzzed repeatedly over the final third of the fight, Kholmatov appeared to have weathered the storm and seized the initiative back at a crucial point when he got on top of a bloody Ford during a back-and-forth 11th.

The American had other ideas. Rather than boxing his way to the final bell and leaving his fate with the judges, Ford took matters into his own hands.

As the clock wound down, he found a well-timed right uppercut that seemed to sap every remaining ounce of energy from his opponent's legs. As Kholmatov tottered around the ring, Ford kept chasing and punching.

Fewer than 10 seconds remained when referee Charlie Fitch finally stepped between the fighters and stopped the action.

After the fight, it came to light that Ford was behind on two scorecards at the time of the stoppage, but he made those numbers irrelevant and won his first world title in the most dramatic of circumstances.

2. FABIO WARDLEY SPLIT DRAW 12 FRAZER CLARKE

March 31, 2024, 02 Arena, London

The unlikely rivals fought each other to a standstill in a classic British heavyweight title fight.

Pre-fight opinions were split on who would prevail. For every person who believed that Wardley's power and greater professional experience would give him the edge, there was somebody who assumed that Clarke's Olympic bronze medal and extensive amateur background would prove too much to overcome for a man who cut his teeth on the white-collar fighting circuit.

A fight broke out from the opening bell.

Although Clarke tried to work behind his jab, Wardley proved impossible to tame and would explode in violent bursts. Battle lines were drawn by the time Clarke was floored in the fifth round, and both men were forced to go to places they had never been before in a bruising, grueling battle.

A badly cut nose left Wardley battling through a mask of blood from the middle rounds while Clarke punched himself to exhaustion.

In a rematch six months later, Wardley would swiftly and brutally distinguish himself with a first-round stoppage. But on this night, they were inseparable.

3. OLEKSANDR USYK SD 12 TYSON FURY

May 18, 2024, Kingdom Arena, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The biggest and most high-profile fight of the year was also one of the very best.

Usyk put his Ring Magazine, IBF, WBA and WBO belts on the line while Fury added his WBC title to the pot in the first undisputed heavyweight championship fight of the century.

As with all great fights, momentum swung one way and then the other.

Usyk started quickly, but Fury warmed to his task and began to assert himself through the middle rounds.

The tide appeared to be turning conclusively in Fury's favor when he rocked Usyk with a pair of damaging uppercuts in the sixth, but the mercurial Ukrainian refused to buckle and produced his now customary lung-bursting, late-round surge.

The ninth was one of the most dramatic rounds of the year. Usyk badly hurt Fury, who spent almost 30 seconds stumbling from corner to corner before the referee

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

ruled that the ropes had kept him up and issued a count.

"The Gypsy King" called upon his own remarkable powers of recovery to box his way through the 10th and somehow finished the last round strongly, but it was the remarkable Usyk – who previously reigned as the undisputed cruiserweight king – who became the first heavyweight since Lennox Lewis to earn universal recognition as the one and only champ.

4. FERNANDO MARTINEZ UD 12 KAZUTO IOKA

July 7, 2024, Kokugikan Arena, Tokyo

Given the way Martinez flew out of the gate, it looked like the Argentine might put himself in the hunt for knockout of the year honors. Instead, Japanese legend Ioka used every ounce of his experience to weather an early storm and turn this junior bantamweight unification into one of the fights of the year.

Martinez couldn't miss during the early rounds, and Ioka struggled to cope with his aggressive, accurate combination punching.

The 35-year-old Ioka didn't panic. Instead, the four-division titleholder waited for the onslaught to subside and then began picking away at Martinez's body as he battled hard to regain a foothold in the fight. At times during the middle rounds, it looked like Ioka might produce an unlikely miracle and add another chapter to his extraordinary career, but Martinez, 32, found another gear and once again reasserted control during the championship rounds.

Martinez deservedly added Ioka's WBA title to his own IBF belt, but the wide scorecards failed to do justice to just how deep he had to dig to do it.

The 115-pound division has played host to some of the most high-quality, exciting fights of the modern era, and this battle sits comfortably among them.

5. VERGIL ORTIZ JR. MD 12 SERHII BOHACHUK

August 10, 2024, Michelob Ultra Arena, Las Vegas

The drama started immediately in this fight for the interim WBC junior middleweight title.

Ortiz went down in the opening round after taking a right hand, but the referee initially ruled the clear knockdown as a slip. Before Round 5, the rarely used instant replay was consulted and belatedly corrected the call.

Ortiz briefly touched down again in the eighth after absorbing a lead left hook, but in-between the knockdowns, the former sparring partners took turns unleashing on each other.

Ortiz was desperate to get inside and had success with short, well-picked shots to the head and body. Meanwhile, the angular Ukrainian worked well behind a stiff jab but neglected it as the temptation to land his threshing right hand and stiff left hook proved impossible to resist.

The second knockdown seemed to light a fire under Ortiz. Realizing that his unbeaten record was in serious jeopardy, the Texan ran through the gears. He began to get the unshakable Bohachuk's attention with crunching overhand rights and rocked him with a beautiful left hook in the 11th.

Both men displayed incredible resilience and heart and exchanged hard shots until the very end, but Ortiz's strong finish earned him a tight majority decision.

6. ARTUR BETERBIEV UD 12 DMITRY BIVOL

October 12, 2024, Kingdom Arena, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

For years, it was thought that an undisputed light heavyweight championship fight between IBF/WBC/WBO titleholder Beterbiev and WBA counterpart Bivol was arguably the highest-quality fight that could be made in the entire sport.

When the world's best 175-pound fighters finally got into the ring, they produced a technical masterclass that more than lived up to the lofty pre-fight billing.

Rather than taking fans on a rollercoaster ride of thrills and spills, the pair engaged in a high-stakes game of poker from the very start, and the tension only ratcheted up as the rounds passed and the consequences of making even the slightest mistake grew ever more serious.

Despite his punches not having the usual destructive effect, Beterbiev refused to panic and continued to press forward in his relentless, methodical way. Bivol maintained his own composure while boxing under the most oppressive level of physical and mental pressure imaginable.

Despite the brutal intensity of the enthralling fight, neither man showed even the slightest sign of vulnerability and both trusted in their tactics until the final bell.

It was edge-of-the-seat stuff right up until the moment Beterbiev was declared the winner by majority decision. He added the vacant Ring Magazine title to all the others and became the first undisputed light heavyweight champion since 2002.

ALSO NOTABLE:

- **Eduardo Nunez** TKO 11 **Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov**
- **Nick Ball** SD 12 **Raymond Ford**
- **Stephen McKenna** TKO 3 **Joe Laws**
- **Hiroto Kyoguchi** MD 10 **Vince Paras**
- **Phumelela Cafu** SD 12 **Kosei Tanaka** RING

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

By Brian Harty

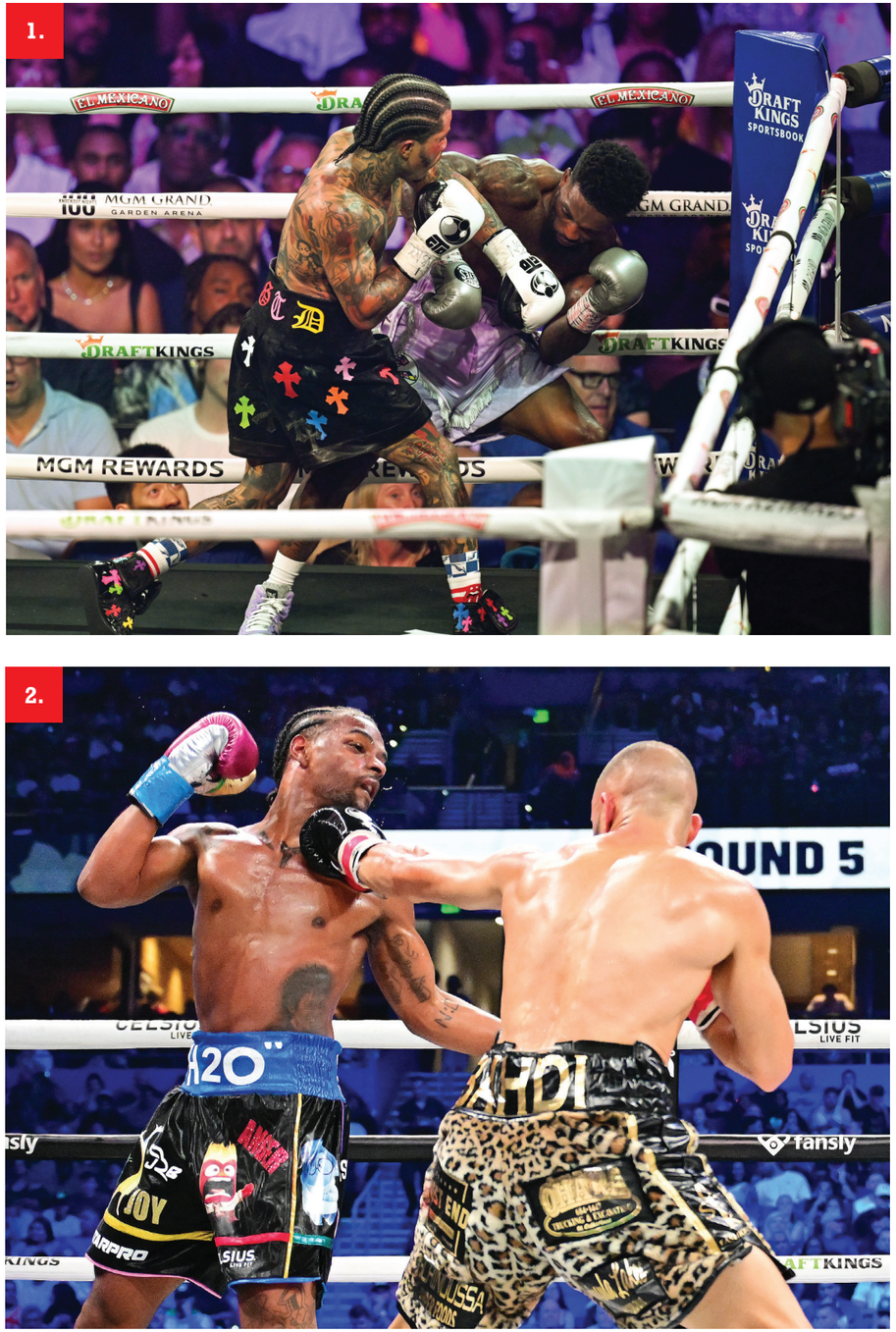
THERE'S A TIME TO BOX AND A TIME TO BRAWL, BUT EVERYBODY LOVES A FIGHT WITHOUT JUDGES

1. GERVONTA DAVIS KO 8 FRANK MARTIN

June 15, MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas

Gervonta Davis didn't worry too much about falling behind on the cards early, content instead to observe through the slot between his raised forearms and let the germ of doubt he'd planted in Frank Martin's mind fester. It wasn't that Martin had flinched when Davis faked a punch at the final press conference for their lightweight bout – what would anybody do? – it was that his reflexive parry came far too late to protect him, had the hook been real. That and Martin's uncomfortable demeanor told a lot. He wasn't ready. Once Tank lowered his gloves to get a better view of his prey in the middle rounds, Martin's remaining confidence crumbled under a barrage that was equal parts sophisticated combos and ruthless bombs. Halfway through the eighth, Davis bullied the as-yet-undefeated contender into a corner and brushed him with a right hook that drew Martin's attention and scattered his defense, creating a wide-open lane for a left uppercut that smashed into the Michigander's chin and shoved him to the brink of consciousness. Martin's warrior instinct kicked in and lifted him upright before he crumbled to the canvas, but Davis had all the time he needed to load up a straight left with brutal accuracy. He was soon stepping over Martin's prone body to prepare for his customary backflip off the ropes.

1.



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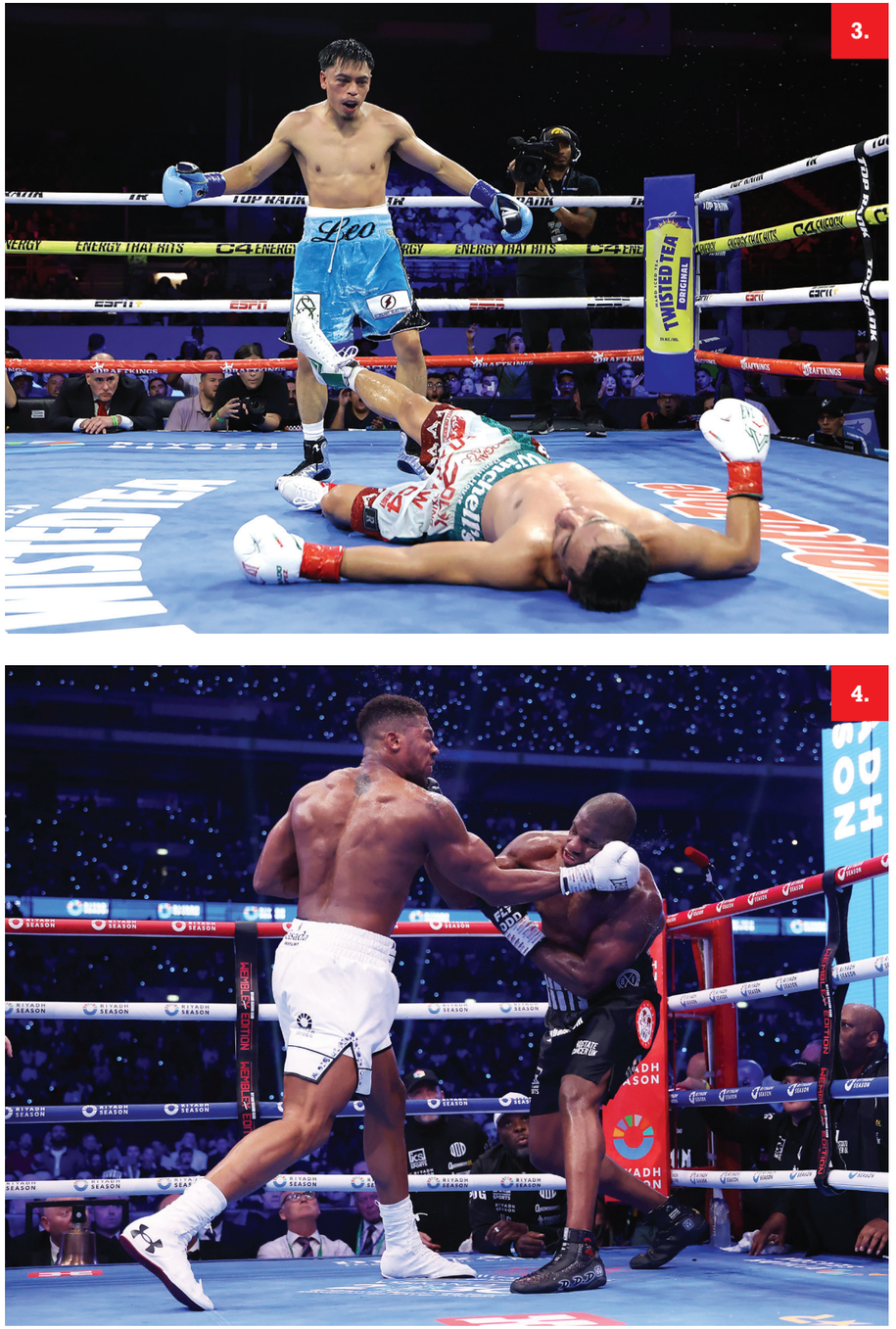


4.

2. LUCAS BAHDI KO 6 ASHTON SYLVE

July 20, Amalie Arena, Tampa, Florida

Going into the sixth round, every "10" on the judges' scorecards had gone in favor of Ashton "H2O" Sylve. The 20-year-old lightweight prospect had dominated Canada's Lucas Bahdi, 30, with the unpredictable blend of sharp punches and fluid stance changes that engendered his nickname. His style was perhaps a bit too loose, however, as Bahdi, his mouth bloodied and his immediate future seemingly bleak, perfectly timed a half-baked jab and speared Sylve with a short right counter that beat the Californian's looping follow-up to the target. The stunned Sylve tried to reset but was met with another straight right that tilted him into position for the icing blow – a left hook that instantly turned off the lights and dropped him face-first into a slumber that lasted for several worrying moments.

3. ANGELO LEO KO 10 LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ

August 10, Tingley Coliseum, Albuquerque, New Mexico

This IBF featherweight title

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

bout had seen plenty of heated exchanges by the 10th round, both fighters strafing each other in full-power attacks that sometimes saw Leo come out on top with punch-and-maul tactics and other times favored the freestyle swings from Lopez. So it was extra shocking to see the fight end with a single clean punch. After being separated from a clinch a little over a minute into the round, the pair came together and Lopez, the incumbent titlist, opted for a stock jab as his opening move. Leo waited for the farthest point of commitment, then countered. The solitary left hook swiveled Lopez's head over his shoulder and erased his legs immediately, leaving the now-former titleholder flat on his back, arms at his sides like a sunbather confused to be waking up in an arena to the sound of raucous cheering.

4. DANIEL DUBOIS KO 5 ANTHONY JOSHUA

September 21, Wembley Stadium, London

After an inexplicably unprotected Anthony Joshua had gone down in the first round from an overhand right, again under heavy fire in the third and once more in the fourth from what looked like a jab, the dejected Brit seemed to get a much-needed shot of adrenaline when he landed a hard right cross on countryman Daniel Dubois early in the fifth. Amid the sound of 96,000 people losing their minds, Joshua went into attack mode and drove Dubois backward, looking for the single-punch miracle that can always happen in heavyweight boxing. The defending IBF titleholder remained calm, though, and then both men threw right hands at the same time – Dubois took the high road and Joshua took the low road, and Dubois got there first. "AJ" received the full force of the punch on his chin and dropped into a 250-pound heap against the ropes, where he was counted out at 0:59.

5. BRUNO SURACE KO 6 JAIME MUNGUIA

December 14, Estadio Caliente, Tijuana, Mexico

Nobody was under the impression that Jaime Munguia had an airtight defense, and in fact his "openness" in being an all-action super middleweight with a carbide chin is largely responsible for his popularity. Had the 28-year-old's past, including a punishing 12-round encounter with Canelo Alvarez in May, started to catch up with him? Maybe. But take nothing away from the undefeated Bruno Surace, even if (and perhaps especially because) his 16% KO ratio gave no hint that he could do what he did. As a grimacing Julio Cesar Chavez watched from ringside in Munguia's hometown, the French sub-underdog pushed aside five rounds of being battered around the ring and connected with a single right hand that immediately floored Munguia and left him to be counted out for the first time in his career at 2:36 of the sixth.

ALSO NOTABLE:

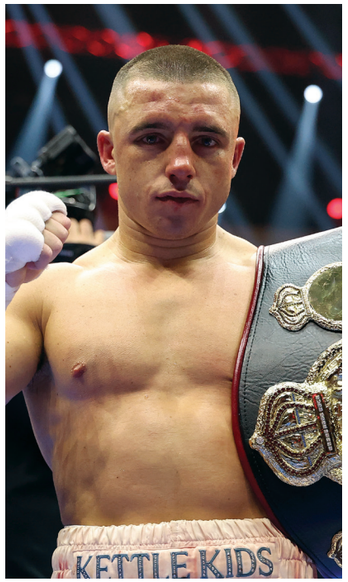
- **Anthony Joshua** KO 2 **Francis Ngannou**
- **Zhilei Zhang** KO 5 **Deontay Wilder**
- **Osleys Iglesias** KO 1 **Evgeny Shvedenko**
- **Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez** KO 7 **Juan Francisco Estrada**
- **Fabio Wardley** KO 1 **Frazer Clarke** RING

Anthony Joshua ended Francis Ngannou's pro boxing aspirations in swift and brutal fashion.

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

By Jake Donovan

FORMER TITLISTS, WRITTEN-OFF CONTENDERS AND EVEN A CANCER SURVIVOR PUNCHED THEIR WAY BACK INTO THE SPOTLIGHT IN 2024



NICK BALL

(21-0-1, 12 KOs)
2024: 2-0-1 (1 KO)
TITLE WON:
WBA FEATHERWEIGHT

Liverpool's Ball was considered unlucky to settle for a split draw in his March 8 bid for Rey Vargas' WBC featherweight strap in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Two knockdowns weren't enough to get the win and the belt. Flip the sixth round on judge Rey Danseco's scorecard, and Ball has a starting point for 2024 Fighter of the Year instead of a comeback tour. Nevertheless, the unbeaten 27-year-old immediately regrouped for another stiff test versus WBA featherweight titlist Ray Ford. The mindset led to a hard-fought split decision win to claim the belt on the June 1 Queensberry vs. Matchroom "5v5" card in Riyadh. Ball was rewarded with a homecoming headliner in October – a 10th-round knockout of Ronny Rios at Liverpool's M&S Bank Arena.

BILLY DIB

(49-6, 27 KOs)
2024: 1-0

The former IBF featherweight titlist was once told that he only had another six months to live after he was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Three years later, Sydney's Dib made the unlikeliest of ring returns at age 39. It was only for one night and versus a made-to-order opponent in Germany's Atilla Kayabasi (12-17, 7 KOs), but the fact that Dib even climbed through the ropes one last time was the true victory. The result was an eight-round unanimous decision for the Australian on December 12 in Hamburg. It came more than 11 years after the end of his featherweight title reign.

DANIEL DUBOIS

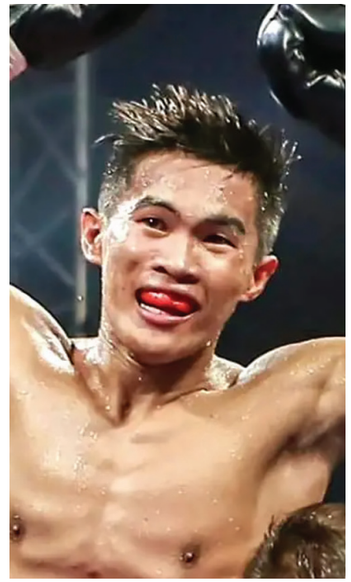
(22-2, 21 KOs)
2024: 2-0 (2 KOS)
TITLE WON: IBF HEAVYWEIGHT

Few expected Dubois to re-emerge as a threat after a ninth-round knockout loss to Ring heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk in August 2023. A 10th-round knockout of unbeaten Jarrell Miller in December of that year instantly breathed new life into the Londoner's career. The 2024 extension began on June 1 with an eighth-round stoppage of unbeaten contender Filip Hrgovic. Dubois claimed the interim IBF title and was upgraded to full titleholder status before his greatest feat to date – a five-round destruction of former two-time unified titlist Anthony Joshua that came in front of an absolutely massive crowd at Wembley Stadium for Riyadh Season's U.K. launch. Dubois scored four knockdowns and notched his third-straight KO victory in one of the year's biggest upsets.

ANGELO LEO

(25-1, 12 KOs)
2024: 3-0 (2 KOS)
TITLE WON: IBF FEATHERWEIGHT

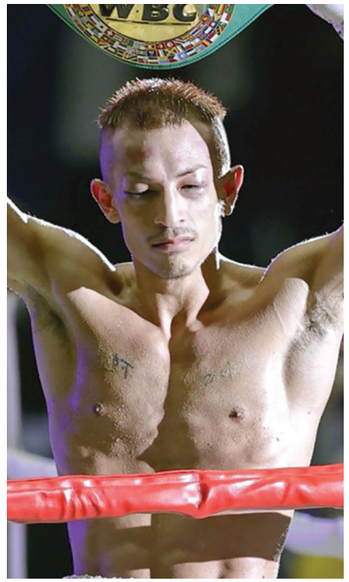
The former WBO 122-pound titlist was all but forgotten about after a ring absence of more than two years. After signing with ProBox TV, a win in late 2023 and two more in 2024 paved the way for another title shot. All he had to do was beat the best featherweight in the world. On August 10, Leo welcomed IBF titlist Luis Alberto Lopez to his hometown of Albuquerque for the occasion. A competitive fight ended with a left hook that put Lopez flat on his back and Leo atop the featherweight rankings.



PEDRO TADURAN

(17-4-1, 13 KOs)
2024: 1-0 (1 KO)
TITLES WON: IBF STRAWWEIGHT

The resurgence of the Philippines' Taduran came the hard way – on the road and against unbeaten Ginjiro Shigeoka, who, at the time, was The Ring's No. 1-rated strawweight. Taduran showed no fear in their July 24 clash in Shiga, Japan. He left Shigeoka limp and defenseless along the ropes to force a ninth-round stoppage and regain the IBF title he'd lost more than three years prior. Taduran's only other win in a title fight was when he claimed the belt in 2019. A draw with Daniel Valladares and back-to-back defeats to countryman Rene Mark Cuarto left him as a castoff. Nearly three years later, Taduran is The Ring's No. 2-rated strawweight.



MASAMICHI YABUKI

(17-4, 16 KOs)
2024: 2-0 (2 KOS)
TITLE WON: IBF JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT

Yabuki's knockout defeat to countryman Kenshiro Teraji in their March 2022 rematch left the suggestion that Yabuki was a one-hit wonder. After all, his September 2021 knockout to win the WBC title came versus a Covid-recovering version of Teraji. Four knockouts later, the 32-year-old banger is back atop The Ring's junior flyweight ratings. Two came in 2024, including his ninth-round knockout of two-time titleholder Sivenathi Nontshinga in Tokoname. Yabuki floored the visiting South African three times to lift the IBF 108-pound belt for his second title reign.

UPSET OF THE YEAR

By Jake Donovan

TITLES CHANGED HANDS, HOMECOMINGS WERE RUINED AND MODEST PUNCHERS PRODUCED MEMORABLE KOS IN SOME OF 2024'S SURPRISE ENDINGS

1.

1. LIAM PARO UD 12 SUBRIEL MATIAS

June 15, 2024, Coliseo Juan Aubin Cruz Abreu, Manati, Puerto Rico
IBF junior welterweight title

Matias (20-1, 20 KOs going into the fight) was armed with the title, a new Matchroom Boxing promotional contract and a stadium full of fans eager to see his first fight in Puerto Rico since the pandemic. The knockout artist entered his second title defense as a healthy -1100 favorite. Australia's Paro (24-0, 15 KOs going in) was fighting in the boxing-wild island nation for the first time and was taking his first shot at a major title. He was reminded of Matias' home advantage with an absurd point deduction in the seventh. It didn't impact the outcome. Scores were 116-111, 115-112 and 115-112 for the visiting challenger. Matias' 16-month title reign ended with a homecoming to forget.

2.

2. PEDRO TADURAN TKO 9 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA

July 28, Shiga Daihatsu Arena, Otsu, Shiga, Japan
IBF strawweight title

The irony in Shigeoka's stunning defeat is that it paved the way to crown the first-ever Ring 105-pound champion. That door opened when the Philippines' Taduran stormed into Shiga to take down the No. 1 strawweight and become a two-time IBF titlist. Shigeoka, previously undefeated at 11-0 (9 KOs), was a whopping -2000 favorite to successfully defend his title for the second time. Taduran jumped ahead in the fourth, at which point Shigeoka's right eye was battered and nearly swollen shut. A barrage of punches in the ninth left the Japanese champion defenseless, which forced the stoppage at 2:50 of the round.

3.

3. ANGELO LEO KO 10 LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ

August 10, Tingley Coliseum, Albuquerque, New Mexico
IBF featherweight title

Traveling to an opponent's hometown meant little to Mexicali's Lopez. Wins over Isaac Lowe, Josh Warrington and Michael Conlan all came on the road in an 18-month span. He entered his fourth title defense as The Ring's top-rated featherweight and opened as a -750 favorite. Leo was written off in January 2021 after his brief WBO 122-pound title reign ended in defeat against Stephen Fulton, despite a subsequent four-fight win streak. Nobody will ever forget the left hook Leo launched to put Lopez flat on his back, though. He raced across the ring to celebrate on the ropes as referee Ernie Sharif ended the contest at 1:16 of the 10th.

4.

4. PHUMELELA CAFU SD 12 KOSEI TANAKA

October 14, Ariake Arena, Tokyo
WBO junior bantamweight title

South Africa's Cafu was the only visiting fighter to leave town with new hardware during a two-day, seven-title-fight weekend in Japan. The purple-haired challenger (10-0-3, 8 KOs at the time) did so against a four-division titlist in Tanaka, who entered his first WBO 115-pound title defense at 20-1 (11 KOs) and as a -1100 favorite by the opening bell. A fifth-round knockdown – courtesy of a right hand – provided the margin of victory. Cafu prevailed by matching scores of 114-113 on two cards, overruling the 114-113 tally for Tanaka.

5.

5. BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV TKO 3 TIM TSZYU

October 19, Caribe Royale Resort, Orlando, Florida
IBF junior middleweight title

The only winning fighter on the list to retain his title also boasted the most remarkable backstory. In addition to facing a -700 favorite in Tszyu (24-1, 17 KOs at the time), Russia's Murtazaliev (22-0, 16 KOs going in) revealed afterward that he entered his first title defense with a broken right hand. His left hand was just fine, though, as Australia's Tszyu found out the hard way. Murtazaliev's left hook produced three of the bout's four knockdowns in the shockingly one-sided knockout win. Tszyu entered the year as the unbeaten WBO titlist and The Ring No. 1 junior middleweight. His 2024 ended with a second straight loss.

6.

6. BRUNO SURACE KO 6 JAIME MUNGUIA

December 14, Estadio Caliente, Tijuana, Mexico
Super middleweight non-title bout

France's Surace traveled outside of Europe for the first time and – with just four knockouts in 27 pro fights (25-0-2) – was considered a safe choice for Munguia's Tijuana homecoming. The Ring's No. 1 super middleweight (44-1, 35 KOs going in) was a massive -3500 favorite and floored the Frenchman in the second round. Things continued to go according to plan – until they didn't. Surace uncorked a right hand to the chin that put Munguia on his back. Munguia rose from the canvas but could not steady himself as he was counted out at 2:36 of the sixth.

ALSO NOTABLE:

Daniel Dubois KO 5 **Anthony Joshua**

Brian Norman Jr. KO 10 **Giovani Santillan**

Denys Berinchyk SD 12 **Emanuel Navarrete**

ROUND OF THE YEAR

By Michael Rosenthal

SOMETIMES BOXERS CRAM A FIGHT'S WORTH OF ACTION INTO ONE THREE-MINUTE PERIOD

1.

1. RAYMOND FORD VS. OTABEK KHOLMATOV (ROUND 12)

March 2, Turning Stone Resort Casino, Verona, New York

Ford was in desperate trouble entering the 12th and final round. Kholmatov had built a comfortable lead over the technician from New Jersey on two of the three cards in a pivotal fight for both unbeaten featherweight contenders. Then mayhem. Ford, on the attack in an attempt to stave off defeat, landed a right hand that sent the Uzbek reeling and followed with a flurry that put him down. It was ruled a slip, but Kholmatov's fate was all but sealed. Ford pounded him as he tried but failed to get away until the referee stopped the action. There were only seven seconds remaining in the fight.

2.

2. OLEKSANDR USYK VS. TYSON FURY (ROUND 9)

May 18, Kingdom Arena, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The ninth round of the historic Usyk-Fury showdown for the undisputed heavyweight championship on May 18 was largely uneventful for 2½ minutes. Then, with one punch, Usyk set in motion a gripping 30 seconds. Following an unremarkable right hook, the Ukrainian landed an enormous left hand that instantaneously rendered Fury semiconscious and brought the packed crowd at Kingdom Arena to its feet. Usyk followed with a barrage of accurate shots as Fury staggered around the ring until referee Mark Nelson ruled a knockdown when Fury stumbled into the ropes. Nelson might've saved Fury from suffering a knockout, but he couldn't save him from his first loss. Usyk never relinquished the momentum and would win a split decision.

3.

3. STEPHEN MCKENNA VS. JOE LAWS (ROUND 1)

August 3, Oakwell Football Ground, Barnsley, England

McKenna and Laws didn't even give fans in Barnsley time to settle into their seats, as a savage shootout commenced at the opening bell and never abated. McKenna, a junior middleweight prospect from Ireland, drew first blood when a right hand to the head forced Laws to all fours about 20 seconds into the fight. McKenna, in full attack mode, followed with dozens of wild punches in an effort to end the night early. His aggression almost led to disaster, as he walked into a left hook that sent him reeling to the canvas. Laws then became the aggressor in a jarring change of momentum, but McKenna survived the crazy round and would go on to score a third-round knockout.

4.

4. VERGIL ORTIZ VS. SERHII BOHACHUK (ROUND 8)

August 10, Mandalay Bay Events Center, Las Vegas

Round 8 of Ortiz-Bohachuk was a microcosm of a stirring junior middleweight matchup – a nonstop firefight with some added drama. Bohachuk handed his fellow top contender the first knockdown of his career in the opening round. He did it again midway through Round 8, this time landing a left hook that forced Ortiz to touch the canvas with his gloves. The momentary setback only stoked the fire of Ortiz, who, attacking ferociously, landed some of his most effective blows. Indeed, the knockdown might have been a blessing. He went on to control the final four rounds to pull out a majority decision victory.

5.

5. DANIEL DUBOIS VS. ANTHONY JOSHUA (RD. 5)

September 21, Wembley Stadium, London

Joshua had been knocked down in three of the first four rounds as 96,000 fans rocked Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 21, which left him in a desperate situation. After Round 4, his trainer, Ben Davison, told the former two-time champion to wait for a lull, double jab and unload a right uppercut in an attempt to turn the tide. Bad idea. Radio analyst Shane McGuigan pointed out in real time that the advice was dangerous because Joshua would walk into a right hand. Sure enough, Joshua was in the process of throwing the uppercut when a brutal right to the chin put him down and out.

6.

6. ABDULLAH MASON VS. YOHAN VASQUEZ (ROUND 1)

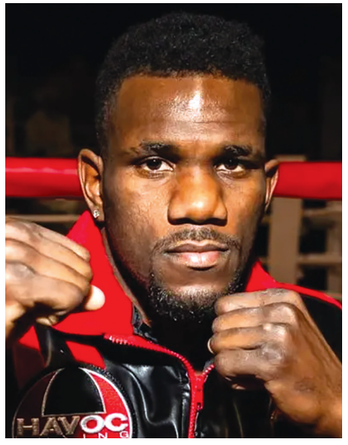
November 8, Scope Arena, Norfolk, Virginia

No one was surprised that Mason, a gifted lightweight from Cleveland, stopped Vasquez in two rounds. That the 20-year-old southpaw had to overcome two knockdowns – the first in his career – in a wild opening round to do it was shocking. Vasquez, a hard-punching Dominican, initiated the drama with a left hook that forced Mason to touch the canvas less than a minute into the fight. Mason, more stunned than hurt, responded by depositing Vasquez onto his back with a left uppercut 30 seconds later and seemed to be in control. Vasquez, hurt but defiant, delivered one more surprise by dropping Mason again with another stunning left hook, but that's all he had. It was all Mason after that. RING

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

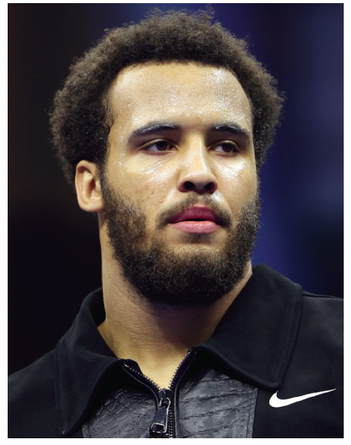
By Joseph Santoliquito

BOXING IS A SPORT OF UNLIKELY HEROES, BUT SOME FIGHTERS HAVE STAR POTENTIAL WRITTEN ALL OVER THEM FROM THE BEGINNING



YOENLI HERNANDEZ

Signed by Dream Bigg Management in August, the 27-year-old, 6-foot-2 Cuban middleweight was a two-time amateur world champion (2021 and 2023) who went 4-0 in 2024 with four stoppages. After his seventh-round knockout of Alejandro Barrera in June, the WBA and WBC were impressed enough to rank him (at 10 and 15, respectively) with only four pro fights on his resume. Hernandez has a relaxed style and can fight in both a southpaw and orthodox stance. He throws highly accurate, effective crosses, hooks and uppercuts. A natural entertainer, he has the propensity to showboat, as he displayed numerous times in amateur tournaments.

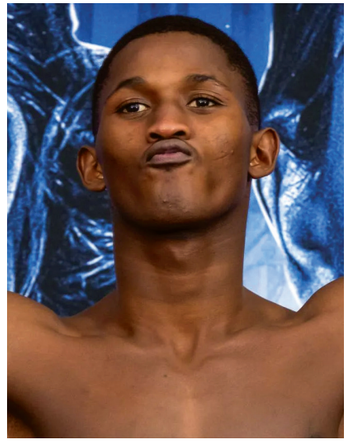


MOSES ITAUMA

It is a little hard to believe Itauma just turned 20. The 6-foot-3 heavyweight has been zapping everyone in his path. Born in Slovakia but raised in England, Itauma (10-0, 8 KOs) scored the biggest victory of his career with a second-round stoppage of Polish veteran Mariusz Wach on the Joe Joyce-Derek Chisora undercard in July. That victory, even though Wach was 44 years old, comes with some cachet. Wach went the distance with Frazer Clarke in 2023, did the same against Dillian Whyte in 2019 and finished 12 full rounds with heavyweight Hall of Famer Wladimir Klitschko in 2012. Promoted by Frank Warren's Queensberry Promotions, Itauma's goal is to fight for a major world heavyweight title before his 21st birthday, a feat only Mike Tyson has achieved.

ABDULLAH MASON

Mason (16-0, 14 KOs) checks all the boxes when it comes to speed, size, awareness and attitude, and there is perhaps no brighter spotlight on a current prospect. The 20-year-old lightweight southpaw went 5-0 in 2024 with five stoppages. Out of 40 scheduled rounds for the year, he fought 13. No one went beyond the fourth round against him. There was criticism that he had yet to be challenged by the steady diet of soft touches Top Rank fed him, although the cumulative record of the five opponents he beat was 87-17-4. Those critics were emboldened after Mason was floored twice by left hooks from Dominican veteran Yohan Vasquez, but they were forced to retreat when Mason stormed through the adversity to win by second-round knockout. Vasquez had won only once in his previous four fights and was easy to overlook, but Mason handled the situation well. Let's see what Top Rank has planned for him in 2025.

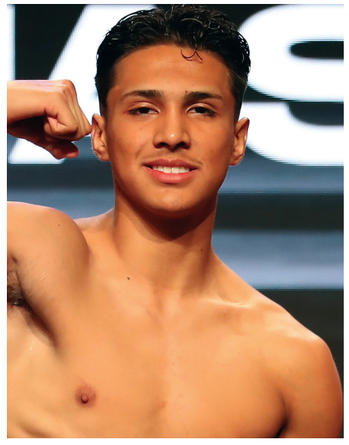


JHON OROBIO

Promoted by Eye of the Tiger out of Montreal, Canada, the 5-foot-6 Orobio (12-0, 11 KOs) was nothing short of sensational in 2024, going 7-0 with six stoppage victories, all in the first or second round. He comes with a boxer-puncher style. Trained by Marc Ramsay, the 21-year-old lightweight grew up on the impoverished streets of Cali, Colombia, and applies the skills he learned there in the ring. Orobio has a relentless style and is not afraid to go to the body. Against Alexis Gabriel Camejo in his only fight that went the distance, Orobio showed great boxing acumen, cutting off the ring early and forcing his older opponent to work off his back foot. Even though it was just a four-rounder, Orobio had no issue investing early in body work. His impressive 2024 featured opponents with a combined record of 86-49-7.

DAINIER PERO

Pero (10-0, 8 KOs) is a promising 25-year-old Cuban heavyweight who went 5-0 in 2024, stopping all five opponents he faced. Since defecting to the U.S., he has gradually moved up from fighting six-rounders to eight-rounders, and his last fight was a scheduled 10-rounder, though it lasted less than three minutes. Trained by Ring 2022 Trainer of the Year Bob Santos, the 2020 Olympian in the super heavyweight division is 6-foot-5 and weighs around 240 pounds. He comes with an interesting backstory, a deep amateur pedigree and is highly active.



EMILIANO VARGAS

The 20-year-old junior welterweight comes with a bold pedigree, as the son of two-time junior middleweight titlist Fernando Vargas. Emiliano (12-0, 10 KOs) is another Top Rank fighter who possesses rock star charisma without the rockstar drama attached. At 5-foot-10, Emiliano may not stay at 140 for long. He went 4-0 in 2024, three wins by stoppage. "El General" is athletic, possesses fast, explosive hands, and has been garnering experience against gatekeeper-level opponents. Expect his opposition level to rise. Vargas began delving more into scheduled eight-round fights in the middle of 2024, ending his six-rounder phase with a KO on the Emanuel Navarrete-Denys Berinchyk undercard in May.

ALSO NOTABLE:

Twenty-year-old junior bantamweight **Steven Navarro** (5-0, 4 KOs) and 22-year-old featherweight **Albert "Chop Chop" Gonzalez** (12-0, 7 KOs) are two more standouts in Top Rank's stable. Both fighters went 5-0 in 2024.

Amari Jones (13-0, 12 KOs) is a gifted, 22-year-old middleweight who went 2-0 in 2024 with a pair of knockouts, including one on the Ryan Garcia-Devin Haney undercard in April. RING

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

By Joseph Santoliquito

FROM MONTHS OF TRAINING TO PRE-FIGHT STRATEGIZING TO THE HEAT OF BATTLE, THESE ARE THE ARCHITECTS IN THE CORNER

DON CHARLES

Charles has one stake in this year's race – and it is a big one. In the summer of 2023, IBF heavyweight titlist Daniel Dubois (22-2, 21 KOs) parted ways with trainer Shane McGuigan and opted to work with Charles. The pair had a bumpy start, getting stopped by soon-to-be-undisputed champion Oleksandr Usyk in August 2023. Since then, Dubois has been elevated to IBF heavyweight titlist and has won three straight fights, including toppling heavy favorite Anthony Joshua in five rounds in September. Charles also has Derek Chisora, who beat Joe Joyce by 10-round decision in July and is scheduled to fight Otto Wallin in February 2025.

ROBERT GARCIA

Garcia had a great year, working with newly minted WBA junior welterweight titlist Jose Valenzuela, who pulled off a split decision upset victory over Isaac "Pitbull" Cruz in early August on the Terence Crawford-Israil Madrimov undercard. Valenzuela (14-2, 9 KOs) lost a unanimous decision to Chris Colbert in March 2023, but he resuscitated his career with an explosive sixth-round knockout victory in their December rematch. Garcia also has undefeated junior middleweight contender Vergil Ortiz Jr. (22-0, 21 KOs). Ortiz was knocked down for the first two times in his career by Serhii Bohachuk in August, but his record remained unblemished with a 12-round majority decision in one of the best fights of 2024. And in June, Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez (21-0, 14 KOs) won the Ring and WBC junior bantamweight titles with a seventh-round knockout over Juan Francisco Estrada, then made his first title defense with a third-round TKO of respected veteran Pedro Guevara in November. Garcia also trains up-and-comers Lindolfo Delgado, Albert Gonzalez, Art Barrera Jr., Leo Ruiz and Emiliano Alvarado.

RUDY HERNANDEZ

The California-based veteran trainer has to be given strong consideration. He guided Junto Nakatani (28-0, 21 KOs) to becoming a three-division titlist with a sixth-round TKO victory over Alexandro Santiago for the WBC bantamweight belt in February, then saw his fighter through two successful defenses. In July, Hernandez was in Anthony Olascuaga's corner when he stopped Riku Kano in three to win the vacant WBO flyweight title in his eighth pro bout. Olascuaga went on to defend the title by stopping Jonathan Gonzalez in the first round. What's more, Hernandez did not swoop in and take over as Nakatani and Olascuaga began to see their careers take off. He has had both fighters since their amateur days.

ANDY LEE

The former WBO middleweight titlist is a rising star in the training game. Since retiring in 2018, Lee began training heavyweight Joseph Parker. He also serves as assistant trainer to SugarHill Steward for Tyson Fury, a relationship that began in "The Gypsy King's" second fight against Deontay Wilder in February 2020, won by Fury (TKO 7). In December 2023, Lee led Parker's team in his unanimous decision over Wilder and followed that with the New Zealander's 12-round majority-decision victory over Zhilei Zhang in March 2024. Lee has done wonders with Irish welterweight contender Paddy Donovan, who is 14-0 (11 KOs) and will be fighting undefeated Lewis Crocker on March 1, 2025.

MARC RAMSAY

Ramsay had a tremendous 2024. In October, Ramsay's stable-star Artur Beterbiev captured the undisputed light heavyweight championship with a majority decision over Dmitry Bivol. It marked the first time Beterbiev (21-0, 20 KOs) ever went the distance, and it also marked the first time anyone ever beat Bivol. French super middleweight contender Christian Mbilli (28-0, 23 KOs), Ramsay's other big-name fighter, enjoyed a 3-0 year that closed with a 10-round unanimous decision over Sergiy Derevyanchenko. Ramsay also trains 21-year-old lightweight prospect Jhon Orobio (12-0, 11 KOs) and 24-year-old super middleweight southpaw Moreno Fendero (8-0, 6 KOs). Combined, Ramsay's top quartet went 18-0 with one undisputed title in 2024.

BOB SANTOS

Santos, The Ring's 2022 Trainer of the Year, is the corner boss for WBC welterweight titlist Mario Barrios, former IBF/WBA junior middleweight titlist Jeison Rosario, junior welterweight Starling Castillo and rising Cuban heavyweight Dainier Pero. He also works under lead trainer Ronnie Shields with light heavyweight contender David Morrell. Santos has lately become the "boxing whisperer," helping reclamation projects like Rosario and Castillo rebuild their careers after losses two years ago. Pero was 5-0 in 2024, all won by stoppage. Barrios encountered a speed bump in November on the Jake Paul-Mike Tyson undercard with a draw against Abel Ramos, while Rosario came off a two-year layoff to fight fellow former unified titleholder Jarrett Hurd to a split draw in August.

ALSO NOTABLE:

Freddy Fundora cannot be overlooked. He trained his son, Sebastian (21-1-1, 13 KOs), who seized the WBO and WBC junior middleweight titles with his bloody split-decision victory over Tim Tszyu in March, while simultaneously working with his daughter, Gabriella (15-0, 7 KOs), on her path to becoming the undisputed flyweight champion. When talking about the top trainers for 2024, Fundora has to be in the discussion.

Sergey Lapin prefers the title "team director" over "trainer" or "coach," but the former amateur boxer who coordinates Oleksandr Usyk's training camps is just as involved with the heavyweight champ's fight strategies and conditioning as he is management. RING

EVENT OF THE YEAR

By Michael Rosenthal

THE TREND OF GIVING FANS WHAT THEY WANT TO SEE CONTINUED IN 2024 WITH A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT PROMOTIONS

1.

1. ANTHONY JOSHUA VS. FRANCIS NGANNOU

Joshua vs. Ngannou was a major event largely because of a previous fight, one in which the former UFC champion stunned everyone by putting Tyson Fury down and nearly beating him in his boxing debut. Everyone asked: Could Ngannou do it again? Uh, no. Ngannou was dropped three times and stopped in the second round on March 8 in Riyadh, which seemed to end his brief career as a relevant boxer.

2.

2. NAOYA INOUE VS. LUIS NERY

The gifted Inoue achieved superstardom with one breathtaking knockout after another, including one over Marlon Tapales to become an undisputed champion in a second division four-plus months earlier. Inoue's elite status and an experienced challenger known for his punching power made this a can't-miss event, although Nery fared no better than anyone else on May 6 in front of more than 50,000 at the Tokyo Dome. "The Monster" got up from a shocking opening-round knockdown and stopped him in five rounds to build on his reputation as a generational talent.

3. TYSON FURY VS. OLEKSANDR USYK I

3.

Fans waited a long time for this. The boxing world hadn't had an undisputed heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis two decades earlier. Fury vs. Usyk would change that on May 18 at Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a new hub of boxing. And millions worldwide would tune in to witness the historic event. The fighters didn't disappoint. Usyk scored a technical knockdown while dominating Fury in Round 9 and won a split decision in a rousing bout. The rivalry was just getting started.

4.

4. TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. ISRAIL MADRIMOV

Crawford was attempting to win a major title in a fourth division on August 3 in Los Angeles. And he would do it in Riyadh Season's first card outside of Saudi Arabia, which added to the significance. "Bud" succeeded, eking out a unanimous decision over the then-WBA junior middleweight titlist. That was only part of the story, however. The show also featured Isaac Cruz, Jose Valenzuela, David Morrell, Andy Ruiz, Jarrell Miller and Martin Bakole. The stars were out in Hollywood.

5.

5. DANIEL DUBOIS VS. ANTHONY JOSHUA

Dubois vs. Joshua was significant on an international level. It was huge in the U.K., as 96,000 people packed Wembley Stadium to witness the clash of Londoners on September 21. The storylines were compelling. Dubois, coming off a knockout of Filip Hrgovic, had been awarded the IBF title vacated by Oleksandr Usyk. And a rejuvenated Joshua hoped to start a third reign as champion. In the end, it was all Dubois. He put Joshua down four times before knocking him out in the fifth round.

6. DOUBLE BILL IN TOKYO

Japanese promoters got creative in October, staging seven world title fights over two consecutive days in Tokyo. On October 13, Seiya Tsutsumi, Kenshiro Teraji, Shokichi Iwata and Seigo Yuri Akui won championship bouts. And, on October 14, Junto Nakatani, Phumelela Cafu and Anthony Olascuaga did the same. Fans couldn't have asked for much more.

6.

ALSO NOTABLE:

Rival promotion companies Queensberry and Matchroom pitted some of their best fighters against one another in the unusual "5v5" event in Riyadh. RING

2024 WOMEN'S YEAR-END AWARDS

By Thomas Gerbasi

1.

2.

3.

In terms of mainstream exposure, women's boxing appeared to take a dip in 2024, but to the diehards, the sport is as vibrant as ever, thanks to top-level talents who are willing to test themselves against each other on a consistent basis. As for that mainstream crowd, they were back on board in a big way late in the year, thanks to a pair of rivals who delivered a second classic in AT&T Stadium. What were the rest of the highlights over the past 12 months? The Ring polled its Women's Ratings Panel to find out the best of the best, including the candidates for Fighter and Fight of the Year.

CANDIDATES

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR:

1. GABRIELA FUNDORA

Still just 22 years old as 2024 closed, Gabriela Fundora began the year as the IBF flyweight titleholder and a rising star in the sport. By the end of November, Fundora had all the belts at 112 pounds, including the Ring championship, and wins over Christina Cruz, Daniela Asenjo and Gabriela Alaniz that have put her on the pound-for-pound list heading into 2025.

2. AMANDA SERRANO

Always looking to stay busy despite her status as one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the sport, Amanda Serrano didn't get rolling in 2024 until July, after a March bout against Nina Meinke was canceled at the last minute. But she more than made up for her time away by first stopping Stevie Morgan in two rounds, then engaging in another 10-round war with Katie Taylor in November that – like their first fight – many believed the Puerto Rican deserved to win.

3. KATIE TAYLOR

Most boxers don't make the final three of a list like this without fighting more than once in a calendar year. Katie Taylor is not most boxers, as she made abundantly clear in November with a second win over Amanda Serrano that proved that when it comes to heart, determination and talent, Ireland's Taylor is not just one of the top female fighters around today, but of all time.

ALSO NOTABLE:

Seniesa Estrada
Lauren Price
Natasha Jonas
Mikaela Mayer
Sandy Ryan
Claressa Shields

FIGHT OF THE YEAR:

KATIE TAYLOR UD 10 AMANDA SERRANO II

After their first fight in 2022 was rightfully deemed the greatest fight in the history of women's boxing, there was just no way the rematch could be as good. But it was. Filled with all the drama, toe-to-toe action and twists and turns of the first one, Taylor and Serrano did the impossible. Add in the controversy over headbutts and the final judges' verdict for Taylor, and a third fight is not just inevitable, but necessary.

SENIESA ESTRADA UD 10 YOKASTA VALLE

Seniesa Estrada's sudden retirement from the sport in October shocked everyone. But it shouldn't have, because after getting the biggest fight possible against Yokasta Valle in March and winning it to become the undisputed champion at 105 pounds, there was nothing else to do but to leave undefeated and on top of the world. That being said, fans wouldn't have objected to a return bout between Estrada and Valle, as this was a pitched battle from start to finish, with Estrada holding off a late surge to win by unanimous decision.

MIKAELA MAYER MD 10 SANDY RYAN

We all know how "bad blood" matchups usually end up in boxing: two fighters not interested in exchanging at the risk of being shown up by their rival. Not Mikaela Mayer and Sandy Ryan. They let each other and the world know just how they felt about each other in the Theater at Madison Square Garden, where they fought for 10 rounds like enemies. And when that happens at the highest level of the sport, that's a beautiful thing. When it was over, it was Mayer leaving the Big Apple with a majority decision win, but Ryan's stock didn't drop an ounce in defeat.

WINNERS

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR:

GABRIELA FUNDORA TKO 7 GABRIELA ALANIZ

Southpaw phenom Gabriela Fundora has great technique and obvious physical advantages over her foes at 112 pounds, but what makes the undisputed champion special is her focus on dominating her foes, preferably via knockout. In November, she took on a tough Argentine who had never been stopped in Gabriela Alaniz, and in the seventh round of a competitive fight, she lowered the boom. Left hands sent Alaniz to the mat twice, the second prompting a stoppage by referee Robert Hoyle that put all the belts in the possession of "Sweet Poison."

UPSET OF THE YEAR:

JESSICA CAMARA SD 10 HYUN-MI CHOI

Jessica Camara has always been a solid fighter capable of pulling off elite performances on any given night. But few gave her a shot at being the first to defeat Hyun-mi Choi in April, especially not in Choi's native South Korea. When the dust settled after a gritty 10-rounder, it was Camara getting her hand raised by split decision in a fight determined by the Canadian's pressure and better conditioning down the stretch.

ROUND OF THE YEAR:

MIKAELA MAYER VS. SANDY RYAN – ROUND 4

Early on in her bout with Sandy Ryan, it looked like Mikaela Mayer could win the fight off her jab alone. But this one was personal, and Mayer wanted to scrap, which was just fine with Ryan. Now, two minutes goes fast in a women's boxing match, but Round 4 seemingly went even faster, thanks to the compelling back-and-forth action led by Mayer and answered by Ryan. Remember, kids, throw your combinations like Mikaela Mayer does.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR:

MIKIAH KREPS

There were plenty of eyebrows raised when former amateur star Mikiah Kreps missed weight for her second pro fight in 2021, but that's been the only hiccup for the 28-year-old in the punch-for-pay ranks thus far, as she's run off nine wins without a loss, including back-to-back 2024 wins over Melissa Oddessa Parker and Mayerlin Rivas, the latter victory over a former world champion that proved that the Niagara Falls native is ready for prime time in 2025.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR:

ROSS ENAMAIT

Yes, Ross Enamait has seen his hair disappear over the years as his star fighter, Katie Taylor, often opts to brawl instead of listening to his instructions, but when it comes to getting Ireland's finest in optimum shape and saying the right things at the right time on fight night, Enamait has few peers. In November, Taylor got off to a rough start in her rematch with Amanda Serrano, but as the rounds went on, he gave her the keys to victory, and more often than not, Taylor took them and unlocked another big win.

EVENT OF THE YEAR:

KATIE TAYLOR VS. AMANDA SERRANO II

Jake Paul vs. Mike Tyson was the fight at the top of the marquee on November 15 in Dallas, but for fans of women's boxing, Paul-Tyson was the walkout bout, with the real main event being the rematch between Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano. And while the hype of this return bout didn't match that of their first classic in 2022, in a year that saw a biopic on Claressa Shields get released and Seniesa Estrada retire from the sport, the biggest event was clearly seeing Taylor and Serrano scrap again.

Voters: Lupi Gutierrez Beagle, Christopher Benedict, Cynthia Conte, Irene Deserti, Jake Donovan, Sue Fox, Thomas Gerbasi, Mark Jones, Yuriko Miyata Nishiwaki, Diego Morilla, Yesica Palmetta, Malissa Smith RING

ALL BUSINESS,

ALL PERSONABLE

UNDISPUTED FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION **GABRIELA FUNDORA** IS THE NICEST STONE-COLD ASSASSIN YOU'LL EVER MEET

By Thomas Gerbasi

Watch Gabriela Fundora fight and you'll see just that – a fight. Sure, she has a technique level that has led her to undisputed status in the flyweight division and the size and power to baffle anyone at 112 pounds. But it's her mindset that has set her apart from her peers, and that was never more evident than in her November bout with Gabriela Alaniz, where she stalked and stalked her foe before knocking her out in the seventh round.

Fundora wasn't content with winning. She wanted the finish, and she got it. As for the root of this attitude, she doesn't hesitate to reveal her secrets.

"Just watching a lot of Godfather movies," said Fundora, who laughs while being dead-serious at the same time. "I think that mentally prepares me for a war."

When we spoke in early December, the 22-year-old was a month removed from the biggest win of her career and about to travel to Germany for the WBC convention, where those in attendance were waiting to kiss the ring of the Lady Don. She captured the imagination of the boxing world in a 2024 campaign that ended with three wins and five belts. And though many fighters have had impressive years like that before, few have done it with the style of the California resident, whose intent is clear the second she walks into the gym or ring.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

"It's how I train, and I like to entertain," she said. "Being a female in boxing, it's show business. It's an entertainment business, and if you want to gain fans and you want to gain the right to have that spot on TV, well, then you've got to prove yourself. And I think with the entertainment of getting these stoppages and stuff, it just elevates us to a different level."

After winning the IBF flyweight belt with a fifth-round knockout of Arely Mucino in October 2023, Fundora soared to that different level with her trio of 2024 victories over Christina Cruz, Daniela Asenjo and Alaniz. And when you couple that with her older brother Sebastian's win over Tim Tszyu for two 154-pound belts in March, it's been quite a year for a duo that seemed to have "settled all family business" last year.

And if you were wondering, no, Fundora didn't rib her brother about not having as many title belts as she does.

"No, no, it's all respect here and we motivate each other," she said. "I'm pretty sure him watching my fight, like how I watched his, makes us just train even harder and be the best version of ourselves that we can be."

Every brother should be so lucky. And considering that boxing is in the Fundora family blood, with ex-boxer dad Freddy training them, stepmom Monique a former boxer as well and each of Fundora's five siblings having some connection with the sport, there was little chance that Gabriela would go in any other direction.

"This has been the dream since I was a little girl," she said. "I knew what I wanted to do and where I was going to be at. I knew who I was going to be at a very young age, so now it's just coming to fruition, and I always had the champion mindset. Now it's just reality."

So there was no pushback from her parents?

"I think it became more exciting because I was a girl," said Fundora. "It made it even more of a thing like, 'OK, let's see how far you're going to really want to take it. And if this is what you want to do, go for it.' My parents were in full support."

If it's possible to be confident but not cocky, Fundora has pulled off that feat as easily as she's compiled a 15-0 (7 KOs) record as a professional. And the rumors are true that the Fundora kids are as classy as they come in this sport, a testament to their parents and a desire to be role models for a new generation.

"I think having my family involved with me makes me stronger, and I have a great mindset because of my parents," she said. "It's because of my family that we're where we're at today, and I say 'we' as a team, because it wasn't just me in that ring; it was everybody. My father, who is also my coach, my brother, who was also in the corner, and my mom being in the background, always providing for everything, they give me that strong mentality that I can keep pushing forward and move mountains. And I do actually appreciate that the next generation of children are looking up to me and seeing that, OK, this is a cool person to follow or look up to and respect. So I appreciate that. And I always try to aim to give the next generation a good example."

I suggest that despite sporting the nickname "Sweet Poison" and leading the way for the "Golden Girl Era," she might be better served using the nickname "The Unicorn," because there aren't many like her in any sport, especially not at 22 years old.

That's outside the ring. Inside of it, the prospect of her being an undisputed champion before her 25th birthday has to be intimidating to her peers in and around the flyweight division, because she's just getting started.

"I think right now I'm just five percent of what I can be," Fundora said. "I think I'll continue to grow, and this is only the beginning of the Sweet Poison Golden Girl reign. So there's a lot more to come from that."

And shockingly, she's talking about going down in weight before going up.

"Maybe I'll go down to 108 and grab some belts over there," she said.

To confirm, I ask if I heard her right about 108 pounds.

"Yeah, why not?" she laughs.

Weight apparently isn't a problem, then.

"Nope."

As a 5-foot-9 southpaw with fight-ending power, Fundora is already a nightmare matchup for anyone at 112 pounds. At 108, she'll be even scarier. Just don't call her tall.

"Honestly, I'm normal height," she insists. "It's not my fault people are shorter than me."

I tell her that I beg to differ, explaining that my wife is a five-footer.

"I am normal height," said Fundora. "Your wife is short."

I agree and we both laugh, at least about my wife's height. And that's what an interview with Gabriela Fundora turns into. From the Godfather trilogy (she thinks the second installment is the best) and my wife's height to her boxing past, present and future, I answered my own question when I wondered out loud if she ever had to go through any bullying in school due to her height.

"I hate to break it to you, but no," she laughs. "My personality now is how it was back then. I've always been this nice person and I'm welcoming to everybody. And I went to school to learn, and I made friends. It was just a normal childhood."

I'll give her the height thing, but Gabriela Fundora is far from normal. And that's a good thing, because it looks like we're going to be watching her unique talent in the ring for years to come. As for next year, she's got some more business to settle, Corleone style. How she does it, well, that's something you don't discuss outside the family.

"We'll see," Fundora said. "This will be a new year. I actually want to go and conquer divisions, though." RING

ARTUR BETERBIEV VS. THE GREATS

A BRUISING COMBINATION OF SKILL AND POWER HAS TAKEN BETERBIEV TO THE TOP OF TODAY'S 175-POUND DIVISION, BUT WOULD IT HAVE BEEN ENOUGH AGAINST CHAMPIONS OF THE PAST?

By Anson Wainwright

This past October in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Artur Beterbiev finally reached the culmination of his decade-long pursuit of becoming the undisputed light heavyweight champion. In a gripping battle between two of the most skilled men in boxing, he came on strong in the final stretch against longtime rival Dmitry Bivol and edged a 12-round majority decision to capture the vacant Ring Magazine belt and unify all four sanctioning body titles.

Beterbiev started his journey as a perennial winner on the amateur scene, claiming gold at the 2006 and 2010 European Championships as well as the World Championships in 2009. Olympic glory proved to be more elusive; he lost before the medal stage in both the 2008 and 2012 Games.

Beterbiev amassed almost 300 wins in the unpaid ranks before moving to Montreal, Canada, to begin his professional career with renowned trainer Marc Ramsay in 2013. The Russian-born fighter quickly proved that he was more than an amateur in pro's clothing. He stopped former IBF light heavyweight titlist Tavoris Cloud in two rounds in his sixth pro bout. Two fights later, he knocked out former WBA 175-pound ruler Gabriel Campillo in four.

When Andre Ward announced his retirement in 2017, Beterbiev was well-positioned to fight for the vacant IBF title. In a feat of brutal symmetry, he knocked out Enrico Koelling in the 12th round to push his record to 12-0 (12 KOs).

After two defenses, Beterbiev met WBC counterpart Oleksandr Gvozdyk in October 2019, and the pair served up a classic. Gvozdyk started fast and got into an early lead, but the cerebral Beterbiev slowly but surely chipped away at his opponent with educated pressure. The Ukrainian was ahead on two of the three scorecards when he was finally floored three times and stopped in the 10th round.

"Beterbiev is phenomenally strong, physically. Either he hits you or wrestles in a clinch. Strong body, very heavy fists," explained Gvozdyk. "Each of his punches are equally heavy. He [puts] constant pressure on you. Not as fast, not the best footwork, but he knows how to compensate lack of speed with his power. He makes pressure, cutting the angles. He forces you to engage [in the] middle distance, where, due to his power, he's very dangerous.

"[He's not] as confident, when some guys [have] survived his attacks, trying to push him back with punches, but it's not an easy task to manage."

After a 17-month layoff due to the pandemic and an injury, Beterbiev returned just as fearsome as ever, stopping Adam Deines in 10 rounds and then overcoming a hellacious cut to bludgeon Marcus Browne into submission in nine.

Beterbiev added Joe Smith Jr.'s WBO belt when he stopped the American in two rounds at Madison Square Garden in June 2022.

"He caught me with a good shot coming forward, right behind the ear, and with the crowd and adrenaline rush, I didn't give myself time to recover," lamented Smith. "I just kept going after him and it got me into trouble. … I did land some decent shots early on, but the fight ended quickly."

Against Anthony Yarde in 2023, Beterbiev showed signs of cracking before roaring back to stop the dangerous Londoner (TKO 8) in an excellent two-way shootout. Next up was former Ring/WBA super middleweight champion Callum Smith, and Beterbiev delivered one of his most complete performances in a seven-round beatdown.

And that brought him to Bivol.

After years of circling each other, the combatants met to battle for ultimate supremacy, and although Beterbiev's 100% knockout ratio ended in his 21st pro fight, he was triumphant.

Due to the close nature of the first fight, the rematch was announced almost immediately. They'll do it again on February 22, 2025.

Beterbiev recently became the longest-reigning titleholder in the sport and currently sits at No. 4 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings. Now in his corner for more than 11 years, Ramsay is well-placed to speak about the low-key, somewhat mysterious champion.

"If training the unified champion represents a colossal job, it is also a satisfying job, because his work ethic is irreproachable and you never feel like you're wasting your time as a coach," he said. "When Artur undertakes something, he does it 100%. He is a very honest person with himself, but

also with others.

"Outside the gym, he is very reserved, and if the majority of people perceive him as a machine of destruction in the ring, in normal time he is rather calm and very funny. He has a very particular humor."

Following previous iterations of "vs. The Greats" with Naoya Inoue, Terence Crawford and Oleksandr Usyk, we decided to enlist the services of renowned matchmakers John Beninati, Eric Bottjer and Ron Katz to discuss mythical matchups with 12 of the best 175-pounders of all time and ask how Beterbiev might've done against each fighter. Here's how they thought it would play out:

BETERBIEV VS. GENE TUNNEY

Tunney, who served in World War I, was best-known for winning the heavyweight title. Before that, however, he excelled at light heavyweight. "The Fighting Marine" beat Battling Levinsky (PTS 12), Georges Carpentier (TKO 15) and Tommy Gibbons (KO 12), and won three of five meetings with middleweight champion Harry Greb. He was a smart boxer able to handle powerful and aggressive opponents, as evidenced by twice beating Jack Dempsey up at heavyweight.

John Beninati: "Gene Tunney was as tough as they come and would wear down Beterbiev. Tunney was a good boxer, good chin and better boxer. Tunney, 12-round unanimous decision."
Eric Bottjer: "Ezzard Charles is one of the two best light heavies in history; the other is Tunney, who was a bigger, better version of [Billy] Conn. Tunney was calculating, always in prime condition and had enough power, according to his opponents – Jack Dempsey, Harry Greb, Tommy Gibbons and Georges Carpentier all said Tunney could punch – to keep even the most aggressive opponents wary. The Dempsey 'Long Count' episode showed that Tunney not only knew what to do when hurt, but how to respond in the subsequent rounds (knocking Dempsey down in the next round and nearly stopping him before the final round). Tunney by decision."
Ron Katz: "[Tunney was] an all-time great, a master technician who fought many of the best of his time. I can see him winning every round. He was that good."

TUNNEY: 3-0

BETERBIEV VS. BILLY CONN

Conn learned on the job after turning professional at age 16 in 1934 with no amateur experience. He weathered several early defeats as a young welterweight and, after campaigning at middleweight for a few years, eventually won the Ring light heavyweight championship in 1939. After three defenses and numerous non-title fights, common at the time, Conn elected to vacate and made an ambitious bid for Joe Louis' heavyweight title. He gave the defending champion fits but got a little too bold when he went looking for the knockout and got stopped himself in the 13th round. Although Conn wasn't a noted puncher, he was blessed with a high ring I.Q. and boxing skills. But could he hold off the marauding Beterbiev?

Beninati: "Billy Conn was a great fighter with a great chin and would outbox and outwork Beterbiev. Artur would be too easy to hit. Conn, 12-round unanimous decision."
Bottjer: "Conn was a natural fighter with a great chin (besides the two Joe Louis losses, his only stoppage defeat was suffered in his fourth pro fight, where he was sick to his stomach). But other than the Louis fights, where he looked great (first match) and awful (rematch), the only video we have is 10 minutes of Conn beating Melio Bettina for the light heavyweight title. What you see is a fighter with a beautiful jab and an impeccable judge of distance who also knew how to fight on the inside. This is another matchup where I see both guys winning if there were multiple fights. But with one fight, with everything on the line, I pick Conn by decision."
Katz: "A gifted boxer who controlled his opponents with a great jab. His lack of power would present a big problem for him against Beterbiev, who would eventually get to Billy and stop him late in the fight."

CONN: 2-1

BETERBIEV VS. ARCHIE MOORE

Although Moore turned professional at 21, it took him almost two decades to secure a title shot against Joey Maxim, whom he defeated by 15-round decision. "The Old Mongoose" at his best was a savvy veteran with bone-crunching power that Harold Johnson (TKO 14), Bobo Olson (KO 3) and Yvon Durelle (KO 11, KO 3) all succumbed to. In total, Moore made 10 defenses, and during that tenure he lost fights for the heavyweight title against Rocky Marciano (KO 9) and Floyd Patterson (KO 5).

Beninati: "The Old Mongoose is one of the all-time greats. In his prime, a terrific fighter. Moore would be too cagey, too smart and would outwork and outsmart Beterbiev. Moore, 12-round unanimous decision."
Bottjer: "A prime Moore doesn't exist on film. That Moore knocked out Jimmy Bivins, Holman Williams, Bob Satterfield and Cocoa Kid and won decisions over Joey Maxim, Harold Johnson and top heavyweights like Nino Valdes. But Moore also was stopped once by Charles and dropped repeatedly by middleweight Charley Burley. The Moore we see today on film was wonderful – and that's when he was in his late 30s – but, like his younger self, vulnerable to punchers. I pick Beterbiev in a 12-round war, very close, with a knockdown giving him a needed extra point for the decision."
Katz: "Moore had way too much skill and savvy. Moore by wide decision."

MOORE: 2-1

BETERBIEV VS. EZZARD CHARLES

Charles, a veteran of World War II, is widely recognized as the best light heavyweight ever despite never winning the title. "The Cincinnati Cobra" had superlative boxing skills along with excellent defense; he beat the best 175-pounders of his time, including Joey Maxim, Jimmy Bivins, Lloyd Marshall and Archie Moore. He later won and defended the heavyweight title eight times.

Beninati: "The Cincinnati Cobra was a slick fighter, great defense, and would outbox Beterbiev. Charles, 12-round unanimous decision."
Bottjer: "Ezzard is one of the two best light heavyweights in history, and Beterbiev would learn more in 12 rounds against Charles than he's learned his entire pro career. Ezzard deftly avoids trouble and has Beterbiev in trouble in the later rounds but is content to win a clear decision."
Katz: "Charles also had way too much skill and savvy. I see the outcome being similar to Moore: wide decision."

CHARLES: 3-0

BETERBIEV VS. BOB FOSTER

Foster had uncommon height (6-foot-3) and reach (79 inches), and he used those advantages to keep his opponents on the outside and at the end of his one-punch knockout power. He took out the smaller but formidable Dick Tiger (KO 4) to become champion and went on to make 14 successful defenses, including 10 inside the distance. During that reign, he fell short in two shots at heavyweight legends, against Joe Frazier (KO 2) and Muhammad Ali (KO 8). Against Foster, Beterbiev would need to get inside and avoid taking damage on the way. With the raw power on both sides, violence and drama would be assured.

Beninati: "Bob Foster was a great fighter but did not have a great chin. Artur would stop Foster – not from the loading up, but the short shots would wear Foster down. Artur by KO."
Bottjer: "Foster's left hand is perhaps the best in light heavy history, not only for his deadly hook but also his jab (Muhammad Ali said Foster had the best jab of any man he faced). But Foster's light heavyweight championship years are filled with no-hopers and he struggled with quality challengers (Chris Finnegan and Jorge Ahumada). It comes down to who has the better chin, and Beterbiev is the clear choice in that department. Beterbiev by KO."
Katz: "If Bob could control the distance with that great jab he had, I could see him stopping Beterbiev at any point in the fight. This could be another knock-down, drag-out brawl, though, because I can see Beterbiev hurting Foster also. In the end I go with Foster by KO."

BETERBIEV: 2-1

BETERBIEV VS. MATTHEW SAAD MUHAMMAD

Saad Muhammad had impressive punching power and otherworldly recuperative powers. The Philadelphia native dug himself out of hopeless situations on several occasions to score dramatic wins. He held the WBC title in the late 1970s-early '80s and thrilled fans with shootouts against Marvin Johnson (1979 Round of the Year), Yaqui Lopez (1980 Fight and Round of the Year) and Dwight Muhammad Qawi. Muhammad-Beterbiev would likely be one for the ages, a firefight between two all-action warriors.

Beninati: "I would call this the aggression fight. Incredible fight. You heard the term fighting in a phone booth. This is it. Matthew was nonstop. This is a great, great fight – an all-time great fight. He would KO Beterbiev late."
Bottjer: "The 175-pound version of Hagler-Hearns, perhaps with more knockdowns. Matthew simply gets hit too much to last here. And Beterbiev, even if he's hurt or down, he will find the finishing touch against a defensively flawed Saad Muhammad. Beterbiev by KO in four."
Katz: "A typical Saad Muhammad fight, but Beterbiev's power would be too much as he would bludgeon Saad, stopping him in around eight."

BETERBIEV: 2-1

BETERBIEV VS. MICHAEL SPINKS

Spinks was a member of the hugely successful 1976 U.S. Olympic team, capping a standout amateur career with gold in Montreal. After turning professional, he quickly established himself with a snappy jab, excellent boxing skills and a right hand that earned him the nickname "Spinks Jinx." He became the undisputed champion by defeating Eddie Mustafa Muhammad (UD 15) and Dwight Muhammad Qawi (UD 15). Spinks made 10 defenses in total before jumping to heavyweight, where he twice bested Larry Holmes (UD 15, SD 15).

Beninati: "Spinks was a great light heavyweight. He was very underrated. Good boxing I.Q. He had a decent chin, if you take out the Mike Tyson fight. However, Artur is too strong and too tough. Advantage Artur. Late KO for Beterbiev."
Bottjer: "Wonderful matchup. A prime Spinks cleaned out a loaded division in the early 1980s and never lost as a light heavyweight. I still think Eddie Davis deserved the nod over him. Spinks KO'd eight of 11 opponents in world title fights at light heavyweight, but Beterbiev is the puncher here. On paper, this ends in a KO. In my mind, Beterbiev takes a decision over the awkward Spinks, who can't get his man in trouble."
Katz: "The right-hand equalizer of Spinks and his movement could present problems for Artur. This is a tough call, but I'll go with Spinks by decision."

BETERBIEV: 2-1

BETERBIEV VS. VIRGIL HILL

Hill captured silver at the 1984 Olympics before embarking on what would be a successful professional career. He won the WBA 175-pound title and reeled off 10 defenses, often at home in Bismarck, North Dakota, where he enjoyed fervent support and was something of a franchise before coming unstuck against living legend Thomas Hearns. Hill quickly regained the vacant title and posted a further 10 defenses, which included going to Germany and annexing the IBF title from Henry Maske. He later added a cruiserweight title in the twilight of his career. Hill was an excellent boxer, but could he handle Beterbiev's aggression and pressure?

Beninati: "Virgil Hill was a good fighter but not great. Maybe Hill vs. [Sergey] Kovalev would be a much closer and better fight. Artur is too strong and too good. I was there when Roy Jones Jr. knocked out Hill, and Artur would do the same. Artur by KO."
Bottjer: "A one-sided fight. Hill gets stopped, as his fine jab will only keep him in the fight for six rounds or so until Beterbiev lands the punches that bring the end. Beterbiev in seven."
Katz: "As skilled as Virgil was, he just didn't have the strength or power to offset Beterbiev. Beterbiev by wide decision."

BETERBIEV: 3-0

BETERBIEV VS. ROY JONES JR.

Jones may have been robbed of gold at the 1988 Olympics, but his otherworldly speed and impressive power set him apart from everyone else as a pro. After garnering titles and pound-for-pound recognition at 160 and 168, he moved up to light heavyweight and became the undisputed champion. Across various divisions, the Florida native beat the likes of Bernard Hopkins, James Toney and Virgil Hill, even snagging a heavyweight title against John Ruiz. It was only after he peaked and his powers waned that he became mortal. This would have been a really intriguing style matchup. Who would have been whose kryptonite?

Beninati: "Great fight. Roy in his prime could have been top 10 pound-for-pound one of the best of all time. Beterbiev would bring nonstop pressure, but Roy was just too good in his prime. I think Roy wins and could stop Beterbiev. Roy Jones Jr. KO."
Bottjer: "Jones was too fast and too smart and had enough power to keep Beterbiev at bay. This match is exciting, but not because of the amount of blows landed. It's tense throughout, as the threat of Beterbiev ending the fight with one punch will keep the audience riveted. But he won't land that punch."
Katz: "This might be tougher than expected. Roy's one weakness may have been his chin. Roy would use all his athletic skill and speed to keep Beterbiev off-balance and win a hard-fought decision."

JONES: 3-0

When Andre Ward announced his retirement in 2017, Beterbiev was well-positioned to fight for the vacant IBF title.

BETERBIEV VS. ANTONIO TARVER

Tarver was a gifted amateur who worked his way up the professional ranks the hard way before eventually beating Montell Griffin to become world champion. The charismatic American lost a controversial majority decision to Roy Jones Jr. but shocked the world by stopping the pound-for-pound great in the second round of their rematch. "The Magic Man" had excellent fundamentals and a solid chin, but it was arguably his ring I.Q. that allowed him to bounce back with a vengeance, winning three of the four return bouts against those who'd beaten him.

Beninati: "Tarver was a great, great defensive fighter. Great boxer and good chin. If he stays away, he wins a close decision. Tarver, 12-round split decision."
Bottjer: "Intriguing matchup, as the tall, talented southpaw gives anyone fits. Tarver has all the tools to win this fight, and if they fought multiple times, he'd definitely come out on top at least once. But with one fight, everything on the line, a prime Beterbiev lands the more punishing, eye-catching punches and wins a close, controversial decision."
Katz: "Beterbiev walks Tarver down and punishes him for a mid-rounds KO."

BETERBIEV: 2-1

BETERBIEV VS. SERGEY KOVALEV

In the amateur days, Kovalev lived in Beterbiev's shadow and was behind his countryman in the pecking order for the national team. The two met in 2007 and Beterbiev won a razor-close decision, 25-24. Kovalev turned professional two years later and went on to win the WBO title against Nathan Cleverly and then IBF and WBA titles against aging legend Bernard Hopkins. He twice bludgeoned Jean Pascal before controversially losing to Andre Ward, who also beat him in a rematch. In his prime, he was a rangy power-puncher with underrated boxing skills. A meeting with Beterbiev would feature fight-ending power on both sides.

Beninati: "This would be a fun fight for the first five rounds, but Beterbiev is too strong – better athlete, better chin and better puncher. Artur would KO Kovalev late."
Bottjer: "Fun fight, as a prime Kovalev puts any 175-pound great at risk. I can see Beterbiev down early and Kovalev down late, then Beterbiev taking a 12-round decision in an exciting war. Beterbiev will threaten to stop Kovalev late, but Sergey has enough moxie to navigate out of trouble and make the final bell."
Katz: "This would be a bruiser of a battle. I could easily see both guys on the deck, but in the end Beterbiev stops him late."

BETERBIEV: 3-0

BETERBIEV VS. ANDRE WARD

Ward was a standout amateur and is still the last American male to win gold at an Olympics, doing so in 2004. He turned professional at middleweight, then claimed Ring, WBA and WBC super middleweight titles en route to winning the Super Six tournament, scoring wins over Mikkel Kessler and Carl Froch along the way. He moved up to light heavyweight and became a unified champion there as well, capping off his career with a pair of victories over Sergey Kovalev. He was regarded by many as the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter in the world. Although not a big puncher, Ward was technically superb and a very well-rounded fighter, able to box one round at a time and piece together dominant decision wins.

Beninati: "Artur is too strong and all wrong for Ward. Ward's best tactics against hard hitters would be holding and trying to outsmart them. I was the matchmaker for the Super Six tournament years back; I saw my share of Andre Ward fights. Andre was great, but Artur – as a former wrestler – would be too strong, and that would be advantage Beterbiev. Beterbiev, 12-round unanimous decision."
Bottjer: "Beterbiev's the bigger man here, and he won't falter down the stretch. Ward is a genius, a jazz player who cannot be predicted or timed, and he'll have some nice eye-catching moments. But Beterbiev will just grimly grind away and take eight or nine rounds in a 12-round match. Beterbiev by decision."
Katz: "Andre possessed great skill and high I.Q. and had enough power to keep guys honest. I see him winning a comfortable decision."

BETERBIEV: 2-1

RESULTS:
(BETERBIEV WIN)-("GREAT" WIN)
BENINATI: 5-7
BOTTJER: 8-4
KATZ: 5-7 RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk, and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwr1ght.

THE GREATEST FIGHT CARD EVER?

IN FEBRUARY 2025, BOXING FANS WILL BE TREATED TO AN OLD-SCHOOL BATTLE ROYALE FEATURING FIGHTERS FROM VIRTUALLY EVERY MAJOR STABLE IN MULTIPLE TITLE BOUTS

By Michael Montero

In early December 2024, Turki Alalshikh announced a fight card that instantly set the boxing world ablaze. On February 22 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, "The Last Crescendo" will air live on DAZN PPV, and it features a lineup that rivals the greatest cards in boxing history.

No, seriously, it does.

There are seven interesting matchups on the card, headlined by an undisputed championship fight preceded by three world title bouts and three interim title bouts. The lineup rivals that of classic Don King pay-per-view cards like "Revenge: The Rematches" (The Ring's 1994 Event of the Year) and "The Grand Slam of Boxing" (headlined by Julio Cesar Chavez vs. Greg Haugen in 1993), which longtime boxing fans still talk about to this day.

Once again, Alalshikh has managed to bring several major promoters together to deliver fans great matchups. "The Last Crescendo" presents fighters from Top Rank, Matchroom Boxing, Golden Boy Promotions, TGB Promotions, Queensberry Promotions and Boxxer. In the fractured modern world of boxing, it is practically unheard of to see promoters come together like this. But money talks, and "Riyadh Season" has proven repeatedly that it can be done.

The Ring spoke with several boxing insiders to get their thoughts, fight by fight, on what figures to be an epic night of boxing in Saudi Arabia.

1. Artur Beterbiev vs. Dmitry Bivol II, undisputed light heavyweight championship

In one of the biggest fights of 2024, Artur Beterbiev was taken the distance for the first time in his career, winning a majority decision over Dmitry Bivol to become the first undisputed

light heavyweight champion in more than 20 years (and the first of the so-called "four belt era"). Now, just four months later, Beterbiev (21-0, 20 knockouts) and Bivol (23-1, 12 KOs) are doing it again.

Their first meeting was about as close as it gets in a championship fight. The fan score on BoxRec.com had it 115-114 for Beterbiev. CompuBox showed nearly even results from the two fighters in every punch category. Many are expecting more of the same in the rematch.

The Ring spoke with veteran trainer Stephen "Breadman" Edwards to get his thoughts on the eagerly anticipated rematch.

"The first fight was really close; it could have been a draw," he said. "Both men are so skilled that they kind of canceled each other out. I enjoyed the fight, but it was more of a technical match. I thought Beterbiev pushed a little harder down the stretch."

When asked if he saw any surprises in the fight, Breadman said it was Bivol who got his attention.

"I thought Bivol fought an excellent fight. I came away very impressed – that was the best I've seen from him. When he let his hands go, Beterbiev had a tough time. I noticed that Bivol is very alert in the ring. He doesn't allow you to set him up with anything. You just have to wear him down.

"That being said, Bivol has a dilemma in the rematch," Edwards said. "He knows that his best moments in the first fight were when he came forward, so he knows he has to be even more aggressive this time around. But that will put him in position to possibly get clipped. Beterbiev is a freakish puncher – hurts guys just by touching them. Bivol is going to have to accept taking that risk to win the rematch.

"As for Beterbiev, I thought he could have fought better in the first fight, and I expect him to look better this time around. I thought he could have gone to the body more, used his left hook more. He won that first fight just off hustle. But people underrate his ring I.Q. and his technical ability. Beterbiev fights with a real sense of purpose. He knows exactly what he's doing."

"In the end, I'm leaning toward Beterbiev by stoppage," Edwards said. "I can see Bivol winning rounds early, but then Beterbiev will run him into something late when he's tired. He'll use Bivol's aggression against him.

"My pick is Beterbiev, but I'm not 100% confident. These guys are just so even. That's what makes this fight so interesting."

2. Daniel Dubois vs. Joseph Parker, IBF heavyweight title

Fresh off his dominant stoppage win over countryman Anthony Joshua last fall, Daniel Dubois (22-2, 21 KOs) will defend his IBF heavyweight title against Joseph Parker (35-3, 23 KOs).

The Ring caught up with Billy Nelson, who trains heavyweight contender Martin Bakole and has a particular interest in this fight. Bakole is set to face Efe Ajagba next in an IBF title eliminator, so the winner of that bout will become the mandatory challenger for the Dubois vs. Parker winner.

"I believe the boxer will beat the puncher," Nelson told The Ring. "I think Parker's experience will play a big factor. He's working with Andy Lee, who has taught him to box and move. If Dubois can't land his big power punches, well… he's not the cleverest of fighters, and he's going to struggle. I think Parker will win a unanimous decision."

Although he favors the New Zealander, Nelson was quick to add that Dubois should not be counted out.

"Daniel does possess the power that can end any fight with one punch," he said. "But if you can negate that, he's in a world of trouble."

When asked who he would rather see win, assuming Bakole wins his eliminator against Ajagba, Nelson didn't hold his punches.

"Martin will stop either of those two (Dubois or Parker). He must have sparred 80 or more rounds with Daniel now, and it was very one-sided. He actually sparred both men and mostly had his way. Both of them know they're not as good as Martin."

Hopefully, we will find out later this year.

3. Shakur Stevenson vs. Floyd Schofield, WBC lightweight title

There are three Americans featured on the big card in Riyadh, and two of them – Shakur Stevenson and Floyd Schofield – will square off in a lightweight title fight. This will be the second defense of the WBC title that Stevenson (22-0, 10 KOs) won in November 2023 against Edwin De Los Santos.

On paper, this figures to be the most one-sided matchup of the night. Stevenson is vastly more experienced, with seven world title bouts spanning three weight classes on his resume. Meanwhile, the younger, less-experienced Schofield (18-0, 12 KOs) is taking a massive leap in opposition.

The Ring spoke with 2012 Olympian and former junior lightweight titleholder Jamel Herring, who was stopped by Stevenson in 2021, to get his thoughts on the bout.

"Nobody is willing to fight Shakur Stevenson," said Herring. "The WBC had to go down the rankings just to find somebody willing to get in the ring with him."

Although he respects Schofield for stepping up when so many others have been unwilling, Herring admits the 22-year-old is facing an uphill, if not mountainous, battle.

"Shakur is a master of distance," he told The Ring. "He is always at the perfect range; that's why his opponents are only able to get one punch off at a time. If you throw combinations at range, you'll get countered all night.

"Look at the Oscar Valdez fight (a junior lightweight unification in 2022, which Stevenson won by a wide decision). Shakur kept him just at the end of his range all night, and Oscar couldn't lay a glove on him."

So how can Schofield break the Stevenson puzzle? Herring points to a fight involving another Floyd for a blueprint to success.

"Floyd [Schofield] is going to have to take a page from Marcos Maidana's book when he fought Mayweather for the first time. He made it ugly. He got physical. He knew that was his best chance at success. That is what Schofield must do here.

"That's the mistake I made when I fought Shakur. I tried to box with him in the first half of that fight. By the time I tried to switch strategies, it was too late. You have to make it rough right away."

Along with Schofield's inexperience against the elite, there was his shaky performance in his last bout against Rene Tellez Giron. Although he won a clear unanimous decision, Schofield showed vulnerabilities and was dropped in the 11th round. Herring wonders if that experience may play a psychological role against Stevenson.

"They say you're only as good as your last fight. Well, Floyd won most of the rounds [against Giron], but he struggled at times. He was put down. Did he learn from that, or did it expose something?"

Some in the boxing social media world have questioned whether the Schofields (Floyd and his outspoken trainer-father, Floyd Sr.) are "cashing out" after that shaky performance, taking the big payday while they can. Herring immediately disagreed.

"That's bullshit," he said. "I see this as Floyd Schofield taking an amazing opportunity. If he loses, there is no shame in losing to Stevenson. He's one of the best. But if he wins, he shocks the world. In that sense, it's a win-win."

In the end, Herring is going with the oddsmakers, who currently list

Stevenson as a -800 favorite.

"I like Shakur by unanimous decision. He has the experience; he's been in there with every style.

"Overall, this is a great card. Almost all the fights Turki makes are 50-50, highly competitive. This card has four or five fights that would normally be main events on most cards."

Herring added, with a chuckle, "My only complaint is that it will probably take six or seven hours to watch it all. I'll probably have to split that up over a few days."

4. Carlos Adames vs. Hamzah Sheeraz, WBC middleweight title

This fight is one of the best matchups that could be made in the middleweight division, which has been all but dead in recent years as the Gennadiy Golovkin era has wound down. Current WBC titleholder Carlos Adames (24-1, 18 KOs) has been calling out everybody and their mother on social media, but very few have seemed willing to take him on. That is until England's Hamzah Sheeraz (21-0, 17 KOs) agreed to take the challenge.

The Ring touched base with Jolene Mizzone, president of Fighters First Management, to get her thoughts on the matchup.

"I think Adames is a good fighter right now but can't rate among the elite yet until he shows me more," she said. "He has only fought three times in three years. I think he fought the right guys at the right time and did what he was supposed to do.

"His biggest strength – and weakness – is his power. When some guys who have power are in a situation in a fight where they need to adjust, like when Adames fought [Patrick] Teixeira (who outpointed Adames in 2019), they can't, because they just rely on their power. That could hurt against Sheeraz."

Mizzone added: "Sheeraz is the solid 160-pounder and Adames is the guy who has moved up (from junior middleweight). Sheeraz has another big advantage, too, in that he's been more active. I always say an active fighter is a successful fighter.

"My prediction is Sheeraz by TKO 9."

5. Vergil Ortiz Jr. vs. Israil Madrimov, interim junior middleweight title

This one looks like a real potential firecracker. Vergil Ortiz Jr. (22-0, 21 KOs) is coming off a narrow points win over Serhii Bohachuk last August, when he was dropped twice but escaped with a majority decision and picked up the interim belt. It was the first time he was taken the distance, and it was his most difficult fight to date.

Meanwhile, Israil Madrimov (10-1-1, 7 KOs), who will turn 30 a few days before the fight, just experienced the first loss of his professional career, against Terence Crawford last year in Los Angeles. The winner of this fight will be in line for an eventual shot at the full WBC junior middleweight titleholder, Sebastian Fundora.

The Ring spoke with former middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik to get his thoughts on the matchup.

"I think it will be a good, even fight for the first four rounds," he said. "But then Vergil will adjust. You'll see the power and speed pick up, and he'll start taking over the fight. I believe he will dominate in the later rounds.

"Madrimov is crafty, though. He's going to bring his tricks, and he will definitely sneak some of the early rounds. He's a good fighter, but I just think that Vergil is too young and too strong."

When asked about the struggles Ortiz had in his last outing, Pavlik said that shouldn't concern the 26-year-old Texan at all. In fact, he thinks the experience only made him better.

"I'm glad he had that tough fight [against Bohachuk]," said the ex-champ. "It was a dogfight. Now Vergil knows he can go through a dogfight. I believe he was able to learn from that fight and it helped make him ready for Madrimov."

He continued: "Sometimes things like that just happen. Look at me: I got hit by bombs from Edison Miranda in our fight, and he was known as a big puncher. But he never hurt me. Then I fought Jermain Taylor, and he wasn't known as a one-punch guy, but he dropped me. It happens.

"You have to remember, Vergil Ortiz was running through everybody, knocking everybody out. The Bohachuk fight was a reality check, and it happened at the perfect time.

"I like Vergil to win a decision, maybe 116-112 or 117-111."

6. Joshua Buatsi vs. Callum Smith, interim light heavyweight title

This all-England showdown matches the current WBO interim light heavyweight titleholder, Joseph Buatsi, against a more experienced but also more battle-worn former champion in Callum Smith.

The undefeated Buatsi (19-0, 13 KOs), who won a bronze medal in the 2016 Olympics for Great Britain, will be making the first major step up in his professional career. Former Ring Magazine super middleweight champ Smith (30-2, 22 KOs) has only lost twice as a pro, to Canelo Alvarez and Beterbiev.

Will the experience Smith gained in those losses against two of the very best of this era serve him against Buatsi? Or has he taken too much damage during his 12-plus years as a pro? The oddsmakers are going with the latter, as most sites like Buatsi as a -200 favorite.

Another factor is size. Although Smith is taller and longer, he fought the bulk of his career at 168 pounds. Meanwhile, Buatsi has campaigned as a light heavyweight since turning pro in 2017. It is also worth noting that this will be only the second time Buatsi has fought outside the U.K., while Smith has fought in five different counties. This will be his third bout in Saudi Arabia.

7. Zhilei Zhang vs. Agit Kabayel, interim heavyweight title

The last time we saw Zhilei "Big Bang" Zhang (27-2-1, 22 KOs) in the ring, he became the first man not named Tyson Fury to knock out Deontay Wilder, scoring a dominant fifth-round stoppage against the former titleholder. Now he's set to face undefeated Agit Kabayel (25-0, 17 KOs), of Germany. The winner will be in line for a legitimate title shot next.

Once again, The Ring spoke with Billy Nelson, who made his feelings on Zhang and Kabayel known right away.

"The battle of the dodgers!" he laughed. "Both of them dodged Martin [Bakole]!

"In terms of the fight, Zhang will be dangerous for the first four rounds. He's an educated boxer with good power, and he's a southpaw. But his speed and movement deteriorate after four rounds.

"I believe Kabayel will beat Zhang. He could stop him late if he goes to the body early on and wears the big man down. I favor Kabayel due to Zhang's age and lack of movement." RING

Michael Montero can be found on social media via @MonteroOnBoxing. His show "The Neutral Corner" can be seen every Monday on YouTube and heard on audio podcast platforms around the world.

Israel Vazquez was among boxing's elite action heroes of the 2000s.

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

The Sad Demise of Israel "Magnifico" Vazquez

By Nigel Collins

I woke up the morning of December third and reached for my phone to check the weather and learn what terrible things had taken place while I slept safely in my suburban bed. My eyes were not drawn to the news of endless wars, famine, floods and crooked politicians. Instead, my sorrow stemmed from the fact that retired Mexican boxer Israel "Magnifico" Vazquez had succumbed to cancer at the age of 46. I knew he was sick, but I foolishly hoped he'd rally as he had so often in the ring.

Like most of you, I have admired and respected Mexican boxers for decades. How can you not? From those who crossed the border in the trunk of a car to jet-setting champions such as Canelo and the Lion of Culiacan, Mexican fighters at any level come to fight, in shape, out of shape, it doesn't matter. They will give everything they've got. It's the only thing they know. Magnifico Vazquez was ne plus ultra of the breed.

Vazquez, however, punched his way into my heart for reasons difficult to explain. Sure, there was his lethal punching power, fan-friendly style and a willingness to take on the very best. I'm certain those qualities were more than enough to attract a lot of savvy fans. Nonetheless, for me there was more. The juxtaposition between his assassin-like persona in the ring and the hint of vulnerability in his eyes spoke to me. Of course, back then I didn't know how it would end, but the poignancy lingers.

Israel was a slugger and a boxer, a fighter who knew the fundamentals but preferred to fight mano-a-mano. Punching power was his calling card and knockouts were his game. Sounds a little bit like "have gun, will travel." But when you have a punch like Vazquez, you don't need a gun. Still, his style necessitates toe-to-toe action, and that means taking a few more punches than the jab-and-move artists and clinch masters.

If you want a peep into Vazquez's soul, see the photograph of Magnifico's pixie-like face on the top of his BoxRec page. His skin seems rubbery. He's smiling the best he could, his right eye black, scuffed and lacking the sparkle of his left.

Away from the ring, the blood of combat washed away, he looked like an overgrown altar boy. By all accounts, Israel was a loving family man. He and his wife, Laura, were raising three children when he died.

Like so many Mexican boys, Israel was soccer-crazy, but when he was around 12 years old his father took him to a boxing gym where his older brother trained. Israel didn't box. He just sat there like an unaffiliated person "auditing" a university lecture.

"Even though I didn't train, I learned a lot just watching," Israel told The Ring for an article in the January 2008 issue. "When I finally started to box, I developed quickly."

Starting with his pro debut on March 3, 1995, Vazquez went 15-1 in bouts fought in Mexico, learning his trade and waiting for a break that would transport him north of the border. It is a rite of passage for Mexican boxers, an opportunity to go as far as his or her talent will take them. Well, maybe. It's one of those "many are called, few are chosen" situations.

There was nothing flashy about Israel. He was just a brave man who knew how to fight. He had help along the way but held his future in his own two hands. Literally. He trained his ass off. Never stopped. Grinding all the way. He knew his conditioning was key to staying on top. It was like being a gunslinger in the old West. There's always somebody after him, somebody who wants his rep, somebody he doesn't give a damn about until the bell rings.

Most of Vazquez's pro bouts in Mexico were small-time club shows, but on a national level his match with undefeated Oscar Larios at the Arena Coliseo in Mexico City – broadcast on Televisa, April 12, 1997 – was a fairly big deal.

"[Larios' people] brought me in as an opponent, as a stepping stone," Vazquez told The Ring. "In the local newspaper, there was a headline: 'Israel Vazquez Going To Get Pulverized By The Dangerous Oscar Larios.' When they said his record (20-0, 16 KOs), I thought, 'Damn, what did I get myself into?'

"When the bell rang, we let it all hang out. Then when I put some distance between us and threw a jab, that put him down. I thought to myself, 'This guy can't take it.' I realized if I pressured him that I could knock him out quickly. He got up, and when I hit him again the second time, he was out on his feet. I hit him with an uppercut, then a right, then another. Boom! He hit the floor like a piece of wood. His head bounced off the canvas. The win helped my career tremendously."

Vazquez's future manager, Frank Espinoza, was not in attendance at the first Larios fight, but he watched a

tape and was blown away by what he saw. "This kid can really bang," said Espinoza. "He had Larios out for five or 10 minutes."

Larios became a sort of satellite to Vazquez. They fought each other three times.

By the time Vazquez fought his first fight in the United States, Espinoza was his manager, a partnership that lasted through the remainder of Israel's career. His U.S. debut was a six-round unanimous decision over Antonio Ramirez at the Sycuan Resort and Casino in El Cajon, California, on March 15, 1998.

Espinoza kept him busy, and word of Magnifico's prowess spread. The crowds that came to see him grew exponentially. The audiences liked what they saw: a steely-eyed young man whose occasional hiccups didn't faze his upward trajectory. He was fun to watch – a quick, determined stalker with a decent defense and a wicked punch. What's not to like?

On May 17, 2002, Vazquez lost to late-sub Larios in a WBC interim junior featherweight match. "I really didn't want him to take the fight, because the fighters we were sparring with weren't the same style," said Espinoza. "I told Vazquez, 'Don't take the fight. We don't have to take it. Just wait.' But Vazquez, the warrior that he is, said, 'I beat him once and I'll do it again.'"

Not this time, Israel. You should have taken Espinoza's advice, but at least you knew what went wrong. "My big mistake was trying to land one big punch while he was landing them the entire fight, hitting me over and over," he said.

Larios knocked Vazquez down twice in the 12th round and the fight was stopped at the 1:57 mark.

Espinoza must have been working overtime behind the scenes, because three victories over modest opponents later, Vazquez met Jose Luis Valbuena for the vacant IBF junior featherweight title at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles on March 25, 2004. Magnifico floored Valbuena in the fourth and again in the 12th round. Soon after Valbuena regained his feet, Vazquez caught him with a terrific left-right combination, prompting referee James Jen-Kin to stop the fight 34 seconds into the final round.

For titleholders weighing 122 pounds, big money is relative. Every now and then, however, a lower-weight hopeful will become a superstar – think Naoya Inoue, Manny Pacquiao, Michael Carbajal.

Extroverts have an edge because they draw attention to themselves, but that wouldn't work for Vazquez. As Freddie Roach famously remarked, "When he comes into the gym, nobody notices."

In the ring is where he was noticed. An opponent sees Vazquez coming after him with a deadpan expression, most likely blood trickling down his face, danger in both fists, convinced he will prevail. Five world title bouts followed the Valbuena victory. Vazquez won them all, four inside the distance.

The fab five were Artyom Simonyan, Armando Guerrero, Larios, Ivan Hernandez and Jhonny Gonzalez. Guerrero gave Vazquez a demanding fight. All three judges scored it 116-112 for Vazquez, but that might have been a tad too wide. Many observers said it could have been a draw.

Larios, the man who would not go away, gave it one last try on December 3, 2005. The Guadalajara native entered their rubber match as the defending WBC titleholder, and the vacant Ring Magazine 122-pound championship was on the line. Vazquez was more than ready for him.

"By then I knew how he was. I had fought him already," said Vazquez. "When I connected with an uppercut, he almost went down … I started throwing so many punches, and when Larios went down, I didn't even realize he was on the canvas. I threw a punch and the referee broke us apart. I thought, 'Shit, they are going to disqualify me because he was down.' But no, they let us continue fighting, and then I threw a jab that opened a bad cut, and the doctor stopped the fight [at the 2:52 mark of the third round]."

Magnifico relinquished the IBF strap due to some alphabet shenanigans involving the ratings. He still had the WBC title and the Ring belt he'd won by defeating Larios.

In a wild slugfest with Gonzalez. Vazquez was down in the fourth and sixth, and Gonzalez was down in the seventh and 10th. Jhonny's corner threw the towel in the ring after he was knocked down the second time. It was an insane fight and I wish I could have been there. The Ring made Vazquez Fighter of the Month. I'm not doing any math, but Vazquez just might have been the thrill-provider of his day.

Mention Israel Vazquez among fight people and they automatically turn the conversation to a discussion about his series with Rafael Marquez. And that's how it should be. Remembering greatness. To start with, the boxers weighed only 122 pounds. The rivalry was special in that it grabbed the attention of the boxing public and created a unique narrative that built to a perfect pitch.

"With the first punch of the first round, my nose was bleeding," said Vazquez. "I think it was in the second round when he broke the little part of my nose that allows you to breathe.

"He would land punches on the nose, and it took me out of my concentration because the pain at the moment was very intense."

Vazquez remained in his corner after the seventh round ended.

"Ten days after the fight, we took him to a doctor, a plastic surgeon we had heard was very good," said Espinoza. "There were prior injuries to the nose. [The doctor] said 100% was closed on one side and 90% on the other."

The second Vazquez-Marquez match took place in Hidalgo, Texas, on August 4, 2007, at the Dodge Arena. From the opening bell, there was frenzied action as the pair traded punches at a remarkable pace. Marquez appeared to have a slender edge in the early going, but Vazquez was relentless and gradually wore him down.

Entering the sixth round, both men wore the signs of abuse they had absorbed. Vazquez was leaking blood from cuts over both eyes – what else is new – and Marquez looked like he had run headlong into a brick wall.

Vazquez dropped Marquez with a left hook in the sixth. He beat the count, but Israel immediately went back to work and didn't stop punching until referee Jose Guadalupe Garcia stopped the fight at 1:16 of the round. The breathtaking combat was The Ring's 2007 Fight of the Year, and the third round was The Ring's Round of the Year.

According to Espinoza, Vazquez received $400,000 and $50,000 training expenses for the second Marquez match. Israel laughed and said, "It was nice and I'm hoping for more. I'm hoping for millions of dollars."

With one victory each in a pair of spine-tingling fights, a third bout was a given. It took place on March 1, 2008, at the same venue where it all started, the Home Depot Center in Carson, California, televised by Showtime.

The rivalry reached its apex in their third fight, one of the very best I've ever seen. Marquez knocked Vazquez down in the sixth, but when he regained his feet, Israel savagely tore into his adversary, taking him by surprise. Back and forth they went, swapping blows at every turn. Just when you thought things were going one way, the other boxer rallied.

The fight seemed even when the bell rang to start Round 12. You just knew the final three minutes were going to decide the winner, and I'm sure the fighters did, too. After a good start, Marquez was still exchanging volleys but appeared to be fading. Vazquez landed a series of jolting right hands and it seemed like Marquez was ready to go, but he stayed upright, desperately trying to stave off his rampaging antagonist. Vazquez forced Marquez into the corner with a series of head shots. Rafael was stunned; only the ropes were holding him up. When he slumped to a sitting position on the bottom rope, referee Pat Russell correctly ruled it a knockdown. Seconds later, the fight-ending bell rang.

Vazquez (embracing Oscar Larios) had more than a warrior's heart; he was kind and compassionate.

It was The Ring's 2008 Fight of the Year, and the fourth was the Round of the Year. The Boxing Writers Association of America also voted it 2008's Fight of the Year.

Ivan Goldman, The Ring's West Coast correspondent, summed it up flawlessly: "Every once in a while, you see two magnificent adversaries in a contest that was even finer than anyone could hope for – a masterful war between uniquely courageous athletes, and it's appropriate to stand back and just acknowledge straight-on the excellence of the fighters and what they did."

Most fans like to think of the Vazquez-Marquez rivalry as a trilogy, but it unfortunately wasn't. There was a fourth fight between Israel and Rafael on May 22, 2010, at the Staples Center. Everybody knew Vazquez's eye would start to gush blood the first time Rafael hit him.

"I didn't want that fight," said Espinoza recently, "but Israel had done something foolish and lost his money. He was in danger of losing his house, so we took the fight. It was sad."

They stopped it in the third round. It was hard to watch. But what took place over the next 15 years was much, much worse. When I first saw a photo of Vazquez after he retired from boxing, I thought the caption was wrong. His face was so skinny it was enough to make you cry. He was suffering from systemic sclerosis and cancer but still managed a little smile.

Magnifico died on December 2, 2024. Except for his right eye, which was surgically removed because of accumulated fight damage and botched treatments, I know of no connections between boxing and any of his physical ailments. But I'm not a doctor or a scientist. All I know for sure is that Israel Vazquez was as brave as any boxer I've known and could punch like a middleweight.

I put a check mark next to his name on my International Boxing Hall of Fame ballot and mailed it to Canastota before he died. RING

My First Time

By Paulie Malignaggi,
as told to Thomas Gerbasi

Paulie Malignaggi wasn't just a world champion during his 16-year professional career; he was one of the most intriguing people in a sport known for them. So whether it was his jackhammer jab, his slick boxing skills or his underrated grit, when "The Magic Man" put on the gloves, you were likely going to be watching. And that's after the pre-fight interviews that were always insightful and entertaining. But every superhero has his origin story … and this is Malignaggi's.

THE FIRST TIME I LACED UP THE GLOVES

"The first time I put on boxing gloves as far as training is concerned, I was 16. I remember me and my friends would mess around. We bought the Modell's little eight-ounce gloves and beat the shit out of each other. I feel like everybody did that in those days. But as far as the first time I put on gloves in the gym, I can remember the distinct feeling, because wrapping your hands is a different feeling. When a trainer wraps your hands, you have the gauze and you kind of feel cool. You're not just playing around with your buddies. A trainer wraps your hands, and then he puts the gloves on you, and you're like, 'Wow, this is an amazing feeling; I can't wait to hit something with this.' And I was feeling confident and excited to learn, I guess. Because I knew I was going to be learning the right way, actually, not the wrong way.

"When I first started, my grandfather and my uncles took me to the gym to get me out of trouble. I wasn't sure I was going to fight, but I did want to learn the right way. I remember telling myself when I went up the stairs in Gleason's, 'OK, I may have been in fights in my life, but I don't know how to fight. Be a sponge. Don't assume you know anything. I'm going to be shown a lot of things that are going to be foreign to me, and what I think is fighting is actually not fighting.' And when I put myself in that mindset, it allowed me to just learn slowly and learn progressively, correctly. So even when I put the wraps on and then the gloves on, I didn't just want to go tear into everything. I wanted to do what the trainer was telling me."

MY FIRST AMATEUR FIGHT – March 6, 1998 – vs. Fernando Deguia

"I signed up for the 1998 New York Golden Gloves. I started in June [of 1997] and I wanted to fight in the New York Metros in the fall, and my trainer (Willy Badillo) was like, 'Nah, you're not ready yet. I'm going to put you in the Golden Gloves.' I was kind of disappointed. I was like, 'Man, I can fight in the Metros. I can compete.' And so I went to watch the whole Metro tournament, and I was starting to really visualize myself in with these fighters.

"So I signed up for the Golden Gloves in '98, and the tournament starts in January, but my weight class didn't go until March. But then once my weight class went in March – I remember the dates; it was one week after another – it was March 6th, March 13th, March 20th, and the final was April 4th. So I fought basically four out of five weeks in a row. So I went from having no fights to fighting almost every week in March and April. And by the time I fought in March, I was nervous, of course, but I was really, really excited.

"The fight was in Glen Cove, so from Brooklyn, it's a drive going to Long Island. I was nervous during the whole drive, but I'm excitedly nervous because I know I've worked hard for this, and I'm trying to motivate myself. I worked hard for this, and it's going to be my moment. But you don't know who you're going to fight. That's the thing about the amateurs; you don't know who you're going to fight. So the unnerving part is not only are you going to fight, but you don't know who the other guy is, whether he's lefty or righty, and all this other stuff.

"So I get there, and I bumped into a kid named Julio Cardenas. I didn't know his name at the time, but he ended up being one of the better guys in the weight class. I bumped into him, and we kind of gave each other a stare, because we knew we were in the same weight class. But we ended up not fighting each other there that night. But I remember he got a stoppage in the fight before me, and I ended up getting a first-round knockout. I drew a kid named Fernando Deguia. The fight started and I just went right across the ring and started punching him in the face. There's really no feel-out rounds, but I knew I was going to stay with my straight punches. That was a big thing for me. I said, 'I don't

Malignaggi's unlikely boxing success was fueled by steadfast self-belief.

Nick Laham/Golden Boy

Twelve years after his humble pro debut, Malignaggi battled Adrien Broner in a major headliner.

have experience, but I know how to throw straight punches, and that's the fastest way to the target.' And I have fast hands.

"I remember the first shot. He threw a little lazy jab, but it was already in my mind that I was going to throw a one-two, and his lazy jab was too lazy. So I came over the top with a right hand and a one-two. I hurt him with the right hand, hit him dead square. He didn't roll with it, and he got an eight count. And then from there, I just overwhelmed him. I don't know if it was his first fight, but it was my first fight, so I didn't want to be cold. I remember thinking to myself, 'I'm going to be anxious, I'm going to react and not just be one of those deer in the headlights guys. I know what I learned in the gym. I know I'm tough. I've been tough my whole life. I know what I've been learning in these months in the gym. Use it. And in case anything hits you, you've been in fights and you've been sparring. You've been in fights all your life in school.' Nothing to be shocked about, but that night, I didn't really get hit. I just did the hitting."

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL FIGHT – July 7, 2001 – vs. Thadeus Parker

"I was 20 years old. That time was very exciting for me because I just won the U.S. Championships, and I won the Golden Gloves in 2001. So I was riding on a high. I thought my future was so bright. Little did I know just how much road was in front of me. But when you're young, you're so optimistic about everything in front of you. And when I was turning pro, there were a lot of people that were really believing in me. I'm walking into one of the best gyms in the world, and everybody in the gym has super respect for me because I'm one of the best fighters in the gym. So it felt good to train every day. It felt good to improve every day. But I almost didn't turn pro in July of 2001, because having won the U.S. Championships, I had a chance to go to the World Championships, which were in Belfast, Northern Ireland. But I got an opportunity to turn pro on a blockbuster card in Coney Island, which is down the street from Bensonhurst. It was a really tough decision, but I'm glad I was able to get on that card and turn pro on that show in front of people from my neighborhood. And the promotion of everything was in and around my area in Coney Island and Bensonhurst. So it was really a lot of fun.

'Wow, I'm the star.' That's how I always approached my four- and six-round fights; even though I wasn't the main event and everybody's not here to see me, I'm the star.

"I always remember being anxious and nervous, but by that point, unlike my first amateur fight where I was angry and ready to show everybody, I knew what I was doing, and I was reminding myself that this was the next part of the journey. When I started boxing, I had these checkmarks in my mind. The first sparring session, first amateur fight, Golden Gloves, national title, Olympics, pro world championship fight. And I remember having these checkmarks, and obviously I didn't achieve all of them. For example, I didn't go to the Olympics. But whenever I would get into the dressing room for one of these checkmark moments, I would remind myself. So I remember getting to the dressing room in the pros and thinking about that checkmark moment, and that was the excitement of everything. Obviously, I was such an unimportant part of the night because the important part of the night is the main event and co-main event, which was Kirk Johnson against Larry Donald and Hector Camacho Jr. against Jesse James Leija. But in my mind, I was building myself up like, 'Wow, I'm the star.' That's how I always approached my four- and six-round fights; even though I wasn't the main event and everybody's not here to see me, I'm the star. That's how I would motivate myself, because my press clippings aren't going to get me to this better life. My press clippings aren't going to get me the respect and get me to that place where people know, 'Hey, you know what, Paulie is somebody. Paulie can fight.' So that's why I had all those checkmarks. Looking back, I didn't achieve all of them, but you know what? There were enough checkmarks there that it kept me always motivated."

(Paulie won by first-round TKO.) RING

PORTRAITS OF PROMISE AND DECLINE
Bakhram Murtazaliev and Dennis Milton

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

Dennis Milton turned pro on July 11, 1985, after winning four New York City Golden Gloves and two National AAU championships. He was a prospect, compiling a 16-2-1 record in his first 19 fights. Then his management team reached for the gold ring and matched him against Julian Jackson in a fight for the WBC middleweight crown. Dennis was knocked out in the first round. In his next two outings, he was knocked out by Bernard Hopkins and Aaron Davis. He never fought again.

Bakhram Murtazaliev won the IBF 154-pound title with an 11th-round stoppage of Jack Culcay on April 6, 2024. Six months later, he lit up the sky with a four-knockdown, three-round devastation of Tim Tszyu.

Wojtek Urbanek photographed Murtazaliev in Las Vegas three days before Bakhram fought Jorge Fortea on the undercard of the 2019 bout between Canelo Alvarez and Sergey Kovalev. Murtazaliev was 26 years old and 16-0 with 13 KOs at the time. Fortea (20-1-1, 6 KOs) was considered a step-up fight. Bakhram did what he had to do, winning a 120-108, 119-109, 118-110 decision.

Milton was photographed at the Boxing Writers Association of America awards dinner on June 6, 2024. Dennis seemed tired and moved slowly. His voice was soft. He had dignity, but a hard life had taken its toll. Four months later, at age 63, he suffered a damaging stroke.

These two photographs capture moments when Bakhram Murtazaliev and Dennis Milton were at opposite ends of the spectrum in boxing. They began fighting with the same dreams. Murtazaliev has come closer to achieving them. But no one knows yet how his story will end. RING

© Wojtek Urbanek

By Randy Gordon

Randy's Estrada-Rodriguez wish came true in 2024.

When 2023 was coming to an end, I was asked by so many of you what fights I hoped to see in 2024. Much of my "Wish List" came to fruition, with the exception of one fight: Canelo Alvarez vs. David Benavidez. I think most of us wanted to see that one. However, these fights from my list (in no order of preference) DID happen:

1. Artur Beterbiev vs. Dmitry Bivol
2. Oleksandr Usyk vs. Tyson Fury (we even got this fight twice!)
3. Devin Haney vs. Ryan Garcia (we only wish there were an even playing field that night)
4. Katie Taylor vs. Amanda Serrano II
5. Seniesa Estrada vs. Yokasta Valle
6. Jesse Rodriguez vs. Juan Francisco Estrada
7. Naoya Inoue vs. Luis Nery
8. Canelo Alvarez vs. Jaime Munguia
9. Anthony Joshua vs. Daniel Dubois
10. O'Shaquie Foster vs. Robson Conceicao

For **2025**, here are the fights I am hoping for (a few are already in place, but until both contestants are in the ring and the fight starts, I'm still hoping!):

1. Artur Beterbiev vs. Dmitry Bivol II
2. Katie Taylor vs. Amanda Serrano III
3. Naoya Inoue vs. Junto Nakatani
4. Canelo Alvarez vs. David Benavidez
5. Oleksandr Usyk vs. Daniel Dubois II
6. Terence Crawford vs. Vergil Ortiz
7. Gervonta Davis vs. Shakur Stevenson
8. Devin Haney vs. Teofimo Lopez
9. Richardson Hitchins vs. Jack Catterall
10. Fabio Wardley vs. Moses Itauma

My top prospects of 2023 all had undefeated records (albeit small ones) in 2024. Let's take a look at who they are, their weight division, what their record was in 2024 and what their overall record is as 2025 begins, along with my brief thoughts on where their careers are at the moment.

1. **Andy Cruz** (lightweight) 2024 record: 2-0 (1 KO), overall: 4-0 (2 KOs). This 29-year-old Cuban Olympic gold medalist is now with A-list manager Peter Kahn and is promoted by Matchroom Boxing. His next fight is scheduled to take place on January 25 in Las Vegas. He is an exceptional defensive boxer with two of the quickest hands in the sport. A world title could well be in his future.
2. **Ernesto Mercado** (junior welterweight) 2024 record: 3-0 (3 KOs), overall: 16-0 (15 KOs). "Tito" stopped all three of his opponents in 2024 inside three rounds. At 5-foot-10, he is tall for his weight class. Mercado's team has scheduled the 23-year-old to face former titleholder Jose Pedraza on January 25.
3. **Emiliano Vargas** (junior welterweight) 2024 record: 4-0 (3 KOs), overall: 12-0 (10 KOs). One of the three fighting sons of former world champion Fernando Vargas and promoted by Top Rank. Just 20 years of age. Emiliano is another young star in good hands. They are letting him learn and perfect his skills before he steps in with the best in the world.
4. **Freudis Rojas** (welterweight) 2024 record: 2-0, overall: 14-0 (11 KOs). This 26-year-old southpaw looks to have it all: hand speed, power in both fists, solid defense, stamina and foot speed. Right now, his toughest fight has been finding opponents.
5. **Lorenzo Medina** (heavyweight) 2024 record: 2-0 (1 KO), overall: 11-0 (9 KOs). Though 6-foot-2 is considered small for a heavyweight nowadays, Medina is called "The Giant Killer" because his handlers are confident he'll one day be ready for much-bigger standouts of the division. Time will tell. He is just 20 years old and still at the six-round level of his development.
6. **Amari Jones** (middleweight) 2024 record: 2-0 (2 KOs), overall: 13-0 (12 KOs). This 22-year-old talent may wind up back at 154, another reason to keep your eyes on that division in the years to come. Jones is an explosive puncher with solid skills and serious potential.
7. **Moses Itauma** (heavyweight) 2024 record: 3-0 (3 KOs), overall: 11-0 (9 KOs). Itauma wasn't extended beyond Round 2 in 2024, ending the year with his dazzling first-round destruction of Demsey McKean in December. His hope is to win a major heavyweight title belt before his 21st birthday.
8. **Paddy Donovan** (welterweight) 2024 record: 2-0 (2 KOs), overall: 14-0 (11 KOs). From Limerick, Ireland, this 25-year-old southpaw's next fight is scheduled for March 1 in Belfast against hometown hero Lewis Crocker, who will bring a 20-0 record into the bout. It will be the main event on DAZN in front of a packed and boisterous SSE Arena.
9. **Callum Walsh** (junior middleweight) 2024 record: 3-0 (3 KOs), overall: 12-0 (10 KOs). Promoted by veteran Tom Loeffler, this hard-hitting southpaw from Cork, Ireland, by way of Hollywood, California, is one of the most promising young (23) fighters in the sport. Loeffler plans to keep Walsh very busy in 2025. His first fight of the year will take place on St. Patrick's Day Weekend in New York's Madison Square Garden. His talent is enormous, though his love of the sport is second to his love for MMA.
10. **Robin Safar** (cruiserweight) 2024 record: 1-0 (0 KOs), overall: 17-0 (12 KOs). Safar and his team, which includes veteran manager Steve Nelson, planned on having several fights in 2024. One was supposed to be on the undercard of the first Usyk-Fury fight, but when that fight was postponed, Team Safar waited for the rescheduled date. On that May 18 card, Safar one-sidedly outpointed former light heavyweight champ Sergey Kovalev.

Richard Pelham

★ ★ ★

QUICK HITS: Top referee **Jack Reiss** and undefeated world champion **Seniesa Estrada** have both announced their retirement from their positions while at the top of their respective games, but friends and fans will be seeing and hearing plenty from both of them. Estrada, who does a tremendous job on the mic, will most likely be ringside very soon. She is also a friend of any camera pointed at her, and companies with products to endorse are taking notice. As for Reiss, who has judged more than 500 bouts in addition to being the referee for 1,152 fights, according to BoxRec.com, will stay on the California State Athletic Commission as a judge. In this corner's opinion, he would also be an excellent head of the Instant Replay Review Committee, which the CSAC believes (and rightfully so!) can be an important tool in the regulation of boxing.

Speaking of the California and New Jersey commissions, I think their executive officers – **Andy Foster** and **Larry Hazzard Sr.** – are the two finest in the world at their jobs. I'd also like to add the knowledgeable **Matt Delaglio** of the New York State Athletic Commission, who, since having the shackles removed after working for years without proper support, has blossomed into a fine chief executive.

Larry Goldberg, the owner of BoxingInsider.com and the president of Boxing Insider Promotions, has turned heads in the last two years with his explosion onto the promotional scene in both New York City and Atlantic City. He has been running excellent shows from the Tropicana Hotel & Casino in Atlantic City and from Sony Hall in Midtown Manhattan, both to packed audiences. Kudos to his matchmaker, **Eric Bottjer**, who is unquestionably one of the busiest and best in the sport.

We all should be taking notice of 19-year-old super middleweight **Marco Romero**. From Overland Park, Kansas, Romero turned pro in April 2024 and ended the year at 4-0 (3 KOs).

"We are in no rush with Romero at all," said manager John Brown. "He is a phenomenal talent, and he is learning every time he goes into the gym. We intend to take it nice and slow with him."

I've seen him. I've announced one of his fights. He is truly one of the most gifted boxers I have ever seen.

And I've seen many!

★ ★ ★

In 1989, as chairman of the NYSAC, I, along with Floyd Patterson, Carmen Basilio and Billy Backus, cut the ribbon to open the International Boxing Hall of Fame museum in Canastota, New York.

The following year, in that same position as Chairman of the NYSAC, I stood at the podium with luminaries such as Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, Willie Pep, Sandy Saddler, Basilio, Bob Foster and a lot more on both sides of me, and I gave a short speech to officially begin the IBHOF's first induction ceremony with the words:

"... and now, it gives me great pleasure to announce the opening of the dream which has come to life, the first year of the International Boxing Hall of Fame."

In June, another dream will become reality.

I will be a part of the Class of 2025. Dreams do indeed come true. RING

Randy Gordon is an inductee in the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Class of 2025 in the Observer category. He is a former Editor-in-Chief of The Ring and has been Host of SiriusXM's "At the Fights" with Gerry Cooney since 2009. He can be reached via email at TheCommishRandyG@gmail.com; Twitter (X) @CommishRandyG; Instagram @RandytheCommishGordon

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

IN THIS NEW SERIES, FIGHTERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH PLYING THEIR TRADE AWAY FROM HOME – BOTH THE GOOD AND THE BAD.

By Anson Wainwright

John Gichigi

TIM BRADLEY VS. JUNIOR WITTER,

May 10, 2008, Nottingham Arena, Nottingham, England • Title: WBC junior welterweight

Tim Bradley toiled in near-anonymity for the first couple of years in his career, never fighting outside of Southern California and only on club-level developmental shows. Eventually, he was given the opportunity to face former Ring Magazine lightweight champ Jose Luis Castillo as chief support to Juan Diaz-Nate Campbell in March 2008. However, Castillo missed weight and the fight was called off.

It turned out to be a watershed moment. Then-WBC President Jose Sulaiman recognized Bradley's efforts, and just two months later, the Californian was heading to Nottingham, England, to face WBC 140-pound titlist Junior Witter.

"I always had my eye on every fighter who was from 135 to 147 pounds," Bradley told The Ring. "I studied the game. I watched Junior Witter late at night just to find a weakness, because I knew someday I was going to face him. And I did that for a year straight. I drove my wife mad, because she would wake up and I'm up at 3 a.m. watching Junior Witter fight.

"It wasn't for a while before I really found a weakness. He was a tricky fighter. He was a switch-hitter; he had power in both hands. He had really good speed. He had great reflexes. He threw punches at the oddest angles – he was very creative with his offense. I came up with a game plan, and I wanted to turn it on in the second half. I noticed Witter faded late in the second half of fights."

Bradley's preparation didn't stop there.

"I'm a planner. I do my investigating beforehand," he said. "I see if there's any altitude. I check the temperature to see if I need some warm clothing, especially to make weight. If it's cold, I bring extra warm clothes. If I struggle to make weight, I need to sweat and have the gear to take care of that. It was May 10. I packed fairly warm, just in case.

"If you're fighting at a certain time, you need to make sure you train at a similar time here in the States. I trained around 4 p.m. because I knew I'd be fighting between 12 a.m.-2 a.m. I planned to stay up all night until early morning, just so my body could be awake around that time."

Bradley and a small, tight-knit team of seven left LAX on Sunday, flew business class and arrived in Heathrow on Monday morning.

They were met by a driver who chauffeured them on the two-and-a-half-hour, nearly 130-mile journey north to Nottingham.

"I get to the hotel and my room isn't ready. They gave us the computer room; I slept on the floor for four hours until my room was ready," he recalled. "I get into my room and the A.C. is broken. It's hot and they didn't have any other rooms available. My trainer, Joel Diaz, prepared me for all of this. He said, 'Whatever happens, smile and be happy.' When it happened, I laughed.

"We trained a few days and had a WBC [weight check] three days before the fight. I knew what I weighed, because I would always bring my scales with me everywhere I went, because I didn't trust anybody else's scales. The promoter brought scales in. I had just got done training. I checked my weight beforehand; I knew what I weighed and I got on the scale. I was like, 'This is unbelievable,' everybody looking all frantic, like, 'You're overweight. He didn't even make the three-day weight limit.' I'm saying, 'That's wrong.' Joel went downstairs to the weight room, he grabbed a 25-pound dumbbell and brought it to the scale. He brought my scale, the gym scale and the supposed official scale that just got calibrated. He puts the 25-pound on the official scale, and I believe it was 2.2 pounds over; it was like 27.2 pounds. He put it on my scale and it was 25 pounds, and the gym scale was off by a pound. We told them, 'Your scale is wrong; you need to get that calibrated.' We came to the conclusion, being from overseas, they were just trying to weight-drain me. We used everything that happened negative to our advantage."

"Desert Storm" was also very deliberate about his sleeping habits.

"I didn't sleep during the night; I would sleep during the day," he said. "I've always noticed that when you fight overseas, you're always fighting real late at night. I didn't want to be tired and sluggish at night. It was beneficial."

The American took comfort when he saw the defending champion on fight night.

"When I got into the ring, I looked over at Witter. He looked like he was a bit tired. His eyes didn't look that great. I was wide awake and full of energy and ready to perform."

His dedication and preparation paid dividends during a close-run fight.

"After the fifth round, you hear my trainer say, 'It's time to turn it up. Loop the overhand right over the top. He's there to be hit,'" said Bradley. "I knew I had to do something dramatic. I knew the first six were very, very close. Once we scored the knockdown [in Round 6], my morale and confidence went up. I went on the attack and backed him up. I pushed the pace. I wanted to show the judges I was in charge."

Bradley made the most of his opportunity, taking over in the second half of the fight to win by 12-round split decision.

"I had pizza as a celebration meal after the victory," he said. "That was the birth of my professional career. That put the whole boxing world on notice. That was a belt I chased my whole career. That was instant gratification for me." RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwright.

Naoki Fukuda

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

2024 was a year to remember for the Japanese boxing scene, highlighted by historic events and five new world titleholders in an era of unprecedented prosperity.

However, it began with deep prayers for the recovery of 23-year-old bantamweight Kazuki Anaguchi, who suffered a brain injury during a rousing 10-round battle with Seiya Tsutsumi on December 26, 2023. Tragically, Anaguchi took his last breath on February 2, the first boxing fatality on Japanese soil in 10 years.

But there was great joy in September, when 88-year-old former boxer Iwao Hakamada won his 58-year long battle to clear his name and escape his life sentence for a 1966 murder that he did not commit.

Choosing the best boxer of 2024 has become much harder than in recent years when that honor seemed to belong to Naoya Inoue. Undefeated three-division titleholder Junto Nakatani has steadily improved his skills and reputation with three impressive KOs in 2024. The current WBC bantamweight beltholder is legitimately competing with Inoue for the nation's official Fighter of the Year selection. The Monster, who was the first Japanese boxer to win The Ring's and the BWAA's Fighter of the Year honor, has won the national award seven times (six times in a row).

Here are my choices for the best of 2024:

Fighter of the Year: Naoya Inoue

It is still Inoue's era, even though Nakatani is approaching right behind him.

On May 6, the undisputed junior bantamweight champ became the first Japanese boxer to headline the Tokyo Dome, the nation's first indoor ballpark and a capital of entertainment established in 1988. He faced Luis Nery, a two-

Naoya Inoue isn't Japan's only boxing standout, but he shined in 2024 and remains his country's biggest star.

division world titleholder and the WBC's mandatory challenger. The Mexican southpaw's lifetime ban in Japan – the result of two infamous violations while scoring back-to-back stoppages of Shinsuke Yamanaka years ago – was lifted by the JBC to make the event, which attracted a crowd of 43,000.

The big dome was shaken when Inoue was dropped in the opening round by Nery's powerful left, but he remained calm and collected after suffering the first knockdown of his pro career. Inoue got up and soon turned the tables, dropping Nery in the next round and again in the fifth before finishing him in the sixth round. The winner joked, "How did you all like the surprise in the first round?" during his post-fight interview in the ring.

Inoue added another defense of his undisputed crown by stopping former IBF beltholder TJ Doheny in the seventh round in September. The four-division world titleholder became the first Japanese boxer to sign a sponsorship contract with Riyadh Season and Turki Alalshikh in November, and then got ready to put all of his belts on the line against IBF and WBO mandatory Sam Goodman on Christmas Eve. It would have been the first time he fought three times in a year since 2017, but the bout was postponed when Goodman was injured in his final day of sparring before heading to Japan. The Monster will be busier in 2025, starting with Goodman on January 24.

Hardest Worker: Junto Nakatani

Nakatani was one of the busiest pound-for-pound-rated boxers in the world in 2024, winning three WBC title fights by knockout. He started the year in dominant fashion, twice dropping Alexandro Santiago en route to finishing him in the sixth round in February, winning the green belt. Five months later, it took only 157 seconds for him to make his

Junto Nakatani emerged as Naoya Inoue's heir apparent in 2024 and seems headed for a showdown with "The Monster."

first defense with a single left hand to the stomach of Vincent Astrolabio. In October, he had no problems with veteran Thai southpaw Tasana Salapat, who'd never been knocked down in 77 pro fights, blasting the challenger to the floor in the sixth frame. Nakatani worked only 13 rounds in earning these victories, but those three bouts were backed by almost 200 rounds of sparring in both his hometown of Sagamihara, Japan, and his second home of Los Angeles with mentor Rudy Hernandez and assistant coach Daisuke Okabe.

Nakatani was added to The Ring's pound-for-pound top 10 in April. The 26-year-old southpaw says his goal is to reach No. 1 on the P4P rankings and believes Inoue "must be the path to it."

Breakthrough of the Year: Seiya Tsutsumi

It is unimaginable how dramatic 2024 was for Seiya Tsutsumi.

In December 2023, Tsutsumi won a hard-fought 10-round decision over skilled southpaw Kazuki Anaguchi by scoring four knockdowns, the final one occurring 10 seconds before the final bell. Anaguchi collapsed in the dressing room and was taken to a hospital. Tsutsumi was so damaged that he could not show up to the post-fight press conference the next day. Anaguchi did not recover from his injuries. The 23-year-old died on February 2 from the subdural hematoma he suffered against Tsutsumi.

Tsutsumi carried the heartache and trauma into his training camp for his first title shot, and on October 13, he lifted the WBA bantamweight title from heavily favored Takuma Inoue in one of the best 12-round fights of 2024. The unanimous decision victory not only avenged an amateur loss to Inoue during their high school days; it was also dedicated to his late rival Anaguchi, resting in heaven.

Comeback of the Year: Masamichi Yabuki

A ruptured Achilles tendon, suffered in training in 2023, hampered Masamichi Yabuki enough to make an ordinary boxer give up on his professional career, but Yabuki is no ordinary fighter. On October 12, he stunned IBF junior flyweight titleholder Sivenathi Nontshinga with long, solid jabs, flooring the gutsy South African three times in the eighth and ninth rounds to earn a ninth-round TKO and regain a piece of the 108-pound championship. The former WBC titleholder had been uncrowned since he was stopped by Kenshiro Teraji in their direct rematch for the green belt back in March 2022.

Yabuki had earned the No. 1 spot in the IBF with a stoppage of Ronald Chacon back in January 2023, but the torn left Achilles tendon (suffered during sparring) kept him out of the ring until March 2024, when he returned with a fourth-round stoppage of inexperienced Kevin Vivas. The 32-year-old veteran continues his career, while inspiring his fighting daughter Yuduki (14) and son Katsuba (11), both national-level amateurs, as well as his younger brother Masanori Rikiishi, a professional who is climbing the 130-pound rankings.

Upsets of the Year: scored by Yuri Seigo Akui, Ryosuke Nishida and Yoshiki Takei

In 2024, Japan's world titleholder club added five new members: Yuri Seigo Akui (WBA flyweight), Ryosuke Nishida (IBF bantamweight), Yoshiki Takei (WBO bantamweight), Shokichi Iwata (WBO junior flyweight) and Seiya Tsutsumi (WBA bantamweight). Akui, Nishida and Takei surprised and impressed people by overcoming experienced and respected foes.

The first upset came in January, when Akui faced undefeated Artem Dalakian, who had defended his WBA flyweight belt six times since winning the vacant title against Brian Viloria in February 2018. Although the Ukrainian champion had to get ready under the national emergency of wartime, the odds were still in his favor, with his amateur background, professional experience and respected skills, to keep any opponent at bay. But Akui led the fight from the beginning. He was determined to keep his severe pressure on the champion and wear him out by the late rounds, which enabled him to earn a 12-round unanimous decision. Akui is the first world titleholder based in the Okayama prefecture, which spawned the likes of Joichiro Tatsuyoshi, Nao Ikeyama and Mizuki Hiruta. As Akui has since made two title defenses, Japanese fans now expect him to unify titles against former unified Ring Magazine 108-pound champ Kenshiro Teraji, who currently holds the WBC flyweight title.

It was an even bigger surprise to see Nishida beat two-time IBF bantamweight beltholder Emmanuel Rodriguez in his first world title challenge, and just his ninth pro fight, on May 4. The tall southpaw challenger got in a rhythm, finding good positions to control Rodriguez from the first round on. In the fourth round, Nishida landed a left to the body to drop the savvy Puerto Rican to the canvas. Nishida managed to hold off Rodriguez's mid-rounds rally to take a unanimous decision. Upset victories are Nishida's signature, as he's done so against former world title challenger Shohei Omori in his third pro bout and also against former WBC flyweight titleholder Daigo Higa in his fourth pro bout. He's now 10-0 after a December 15 title defense.

Just two days after Nishida beat Rodriguez, Takei pulled off a big win over WBO bantamweight titleholder Jason Moloney in his ninth pro bout on the Inoue-Nery undercard. The popular former kickboxing champion started winning rounds with well-prepared, quick in-out movement and his own erratic southpaw style against the disciplined Australian, who staged a furious late rally that fell short. Takei won a hard-fought unanimous decision and became the 100th world titleholder recognized by the Japan Boxing Commission record book, which dates back to Yoshio Shirai winning the world flyweight championship in 1952.

Prospect of the Year: Riku Masuda

The next star from Japan may be Riku Masuda, the fast-rising Japan bantamweight champion from the Teiken stable.

The 27-year-old southpaw has displayed savvy punching prowess in both hands since his professional debut in July 2022.

Naoki Fukuda

Seiya Tsutsumi (left) went from tragedy to triumph with his rousing 12-round victory over Takuma Inoue.

He earned recognition as one of the top domestic boxers in his fourth pro bout, a hard-fought 10-round decision loss to Seiya Tsutsumi for the national title in the semifinal of Monster Tournament in August 2023.

In February, Masuda came back to the ring with a surprising first-round KO over Filipino veteran Jonas Sultan, courtesy of one straight left to the body. He proceeded to a rematch with Fumiya Fuse, who'd won the national title vacated by Tsutsumi, and stopped him again with a clean right hook in the fourth round in July. In November, he KO'd veteran Yoshihiro Utsumi in the seventh round to make the first defense of his national title. His six victories are all by knockout, and he's currently ranked in the top 15 of all four major sanctioning bodies.

★ ★ ★

AUSTRALIA

BY ANTHONY COCKS

Ring Magazine and IBF cruiserweight champion Jai Opetaia was one of the few top-flight Aussie boxers to survive 2024 without a loss.

The dynamic southpaw proved his win over Mairis Briedis two years ago was no fluke, outpointing the Latvian veteran in Saudi Arabia in May before battering Jack Massey into submission in six rounds, again in Saudi Arabia, in October.

Opetaia kicks off his 2025 campaign with a world title defense against undefeated New Zealander David Nyika, who steps in to replace the injured Huseyin Cinkara of Germany. Olympic bronze medalist Nyika, profiled as the subject of "New Faces" in the December 2024 edition of The Ring, is a former sparring partner of Opetaia. If all went well, the bout will have taken place by the time you read this, as it was scheduled for January 8 at the Convention Centre on the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Liam Paro ambushed Subriel Matias in Puerto Rico in June to lift the IBF junior welterweight title in what was one of the upsets of the year, but the lefthander's return to the island six months later ended in a points defeat to Richardson Hitchins.

Jason Moloney kicked off 2024 with an impressive defense of his WBO bantamweight title against Saul Sanchez via majority decision in Quebec City, Canada. A trip to Japan in May to face Yoshiki Takei didn't go as well, with the former kickboxing champion annexing the

Jai Opetaia is set to defend his Ring/IBF cruiserweight championship in January.

Australian's belt by unanimous decision.

Jason's twin brother, Andrew, also had mixed fortunes in 2024. First was a disputed split-decision loss to Pedro Guevara in Perth, Western Australia, in May on the undercard of the vacant IBF lightweight title fight between Vasiliy Lomachenko and George Kambosos Jr. In the main event, Lomachenko dominated Kambosos, dropping him twice in the 11th to force the stoppage in the penultimate round. Moloney bounced back with a third-round knockout of Jakrawut Majungoen in December.

Also on the Loma-Kambosos card, Australian-based Kiwi Cherneka Johnson scored a majority decision victory over England's Nina Hughes to win the WBA bantamweight title.

Skye Nicolson continued to fly the flag on the world stage, winning the vacant WBC featherweight title against Sarah Mahfoud in Las Vegas before successfully defending the strap against Dyana Vargas in Philadelphia and Raven Chapman in Saudi Arabia. All three victories came on points.

Alex Winwood's bid to claim a world title in fewer fights than Jeff Fenech was thwarted by Thammanoon Niyomtrong (aka Knockout CP Freshmart) in Perth in September. Thailand's Niyomtrong retained his WBA strawweight title by majority decision but would himself be crushed by Oscar Collazo two months later in a fight for the vacant Ring Magazine championship.

Tim Tszyu lurched from one disaster to another in 2024. In his Las Vegas debut in March, Tszyu suffered a nasty gash to his scalp early in the bout against late replacement Sebastian Fundora, who stepped in when Keith Thurman was injured in training. Tszyu battled bravely through a mask of blood but ultimately lost his WBO junior middleweight bauble by split decision.

Things went from bad to worse for Tszyu in Orlando, Florida, in October when he challenged Bakhram Murtazaliev for his IBF belt. The Russian hurt Tszyu early, dropping him twice in the second round and again in the third to claim a TKO victory.

Tim's younger brother Nikita, a fellow 154-pounder, continued to make a name for himself by outpointing Danilo Creati and scoring a ninth-round stoppage of Koen Mazoudier in a pair of action-packed bouts.

Junior featherweight contender Sam Goodman will finally get his shot at Ring Magazine and undisputed 122-pound champion Naoya Inoue in Tokyo on January 24. The bout was originally scheduled for Christmas Eve before Goodman suffered a cut over his left eye in his final sparring session.

Aussie fight fans will be hoping for better fortunes for their boxers in 2025.

★ ★ ★

ARGENTINA

BY DIEGO MORILLA

A busy month of action for Argentine boxing had its most outstanding fight on December 7, when two-time Olympian Yamil Peralta traveled once again to Canada to face fellow Ring-rated cruiserweight Ryan Rozicki. It was a rematch that was two years in the making after their first encounter back in mid-2022 ended in one of the most egregious robberies of that year. The split-decision victory for Rozicki was so questionable that even the WBC refused to acknowledge the scorecards produced by the all-Canadian panel of judges and threw out the result, at least for the purpose of the organization's vacant "interim" belt (in the record books, it's still officially a win for Rozicki).

This time, the controversy was just as bad as the first bout, with a dubious majority draw appearing to favor the local fighter. It was another solid performance by the 33-year-old Peralta, who once again failed in his bid to become the best Peralta in his country's boxing history. Given the result of the fight and the circumstances around it, all signs point toward a third fight against the 29-year-old Rozicki in which Yamil will try to one-up Gregorio and Avenamar, who although not related to him are still the most memorable Argentines to wear the surname, with phenomenal records and accomplishments on the world stage back in the 1960s and '70s.

Peralta's trip to Canada was not, however, as bad as Alberto Palmetta's homecoming bout in Argentina. Fighting out of Miami for the past three and a half years, the 30-year-old Palmetta (a former Olympic teammate of Peralta) aimed to end a 1-2 streak in his last three bouts with a soft touch in his homeland, but his foe, Joel Mafauad, apparently never got the memo. Fighting in the main event of a card at Casino Buenos Aires on November 30, Mafauad, 27, impressed the judges with his power and accuracy, negating Palmetta's more polished boxing skills and superb conditioning to score a mild upset.

Mild or not, "upset" was definitely the word for Palmetta, who went on a week-long rant on both social and traditional media detailing a conspiracy theory about the manipulation of the result that was as unclear as it was unsubstantiated.

A disappointing month for Argentine fighters at the international level continued on December 14 in Ontario, California, with previously unbeaten Gerardo Vergara losing by technical knockout in his first pro bout outside of his homeland against Charles Conwell in a junior middleweight bout. The 30-year-old Vergara was off to a good start but was later dominated by the Ring-rated Conwell as the 27-year-old boxer-puncher turned up the pressure on the visitor, aiming for the stoppage, which came at the 2:51 mark of the seventh round.

The always active local scene saw a few prospects scoring significant victories.

On Friday, November 13, title challenger Jeremias Ponce made it to 3-0 on the comeback trail after his failed bid to lift the IBF junior welterweight belt from Subriel Matias in 2023. This time, he took care of Guido Marquez with a TKO win in three rounds at the fabled Argentine Boxing Federation stadium. Still considered one of Argentina's most likely to succeed, Ponce promised to remain busy enough to secure another title shot in 2025.

With a similar goal, and with his work cut out for him in the crowded super middleweight division, Pablo "Pacman" Corzo remained unbeaten in the main event of the same card, stopping Colombia's Jose Yañez in four rounds. The colorful boxer-puncher may lack the explosiveness of the division's top dogs at the world level, but he remains one of the most entertaining fighters to watch in the local scene.

In another talent-laden card at the same stadium on December 7, unbeaten prospect Alan Chaves led the charge of the younger generation with a second-round stoppage win over Mexico's Ivan Basurto Monroy. Following in the footsteps of his granddad and uncles, including former welterweight contender Diego Chaves, the 23-year-old Alan remains a diamond in the rough who is already begging for bigger and better challenges in the lightweight division.

Earlier that night, fellow young gun Ayrton Gimenez earned a hard-fought stoppage win over Cristian Cancino in seven rounds at the junior lightweight level. The 25-year-old Gimenez's only loss took place in his first bout outside of Argentina and, so far, his only trip abroad. What he lacks in punching power, he owns in boxing skills and speed.

Also scoring a reassuring win, fringe contender Junior Zarate regained lost ground after an unfair loss in South Africa back in September against Mpumelelo Tshabalala with a win over Venezuela's Winston Orono in a unanimous decision after 10 rounds. Fighting at the junior flyweight level, Zarate had a 10-0 streak going into the Tshabalala bout and, at 35, his days may be numbered, but he remains a dangerous proposition for anyone in the top tier of the 108-pound division.

Another once-promising contender trying to regain lost ground is Neri Muñoz, who improved his chances of getting a shot at the WBA lightweight title at the expense of Uruguay's Jose Acevedo on November 16. On the comeback trail since a fateful night in 2023 when his ascent was halted by Elias Haedo in two rounds, the 27-year-old Muñoz is in a hurry to make his bid on the international stage. His superb performance against a foe who came to fight every minute of every round seems like a good starting point for that final charge toward the top of the hill.

It was a back-and-forth battle of will and endurance, and a close affair on the scorecards going into the final stretch. Sensing opportunity, Acevedo risked it all in the 10th and final round, but a counterattack by Muñoz midway through the frame sent the visitor to the canvas for an eight count. With the stoppage within reach, Muñoz went for the kill and overwhelmed his foe to score a TKO win with only three seconds remaining on the clock.

Diego M. Morilla has been covering boxing since 1997 and is based in Argentina. Follow him on X @MorillaBoxing.

★ ★ ★

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Here are my unofficial South African boxing awards for a rollercoaster 2024:

Fighter of the Year – Phumelele Cafu

The man of the year should undoubtedly be Phumelele Cafu, who upset Kosei Tanaka in Japan to take the WBO 115-pound belt.

From the start, it was evident that Tanaka was the stronger of the two, but Cafu had the edge in speed and defense. Cafu had his best moment in the fifth. He timed Tanaka perfectly coming in, sending the Japanese fighter to the canvas with a short right.

Tanaka got up on unsteady legs and survived. He clawed himself back into the fight by the seventh, ripping shots to the body and head of a suddenly wobbling Cafu. Tanaka looked on the verge of turning it around.

Cafu, however, displayed remarkable grit. He planted his feet in the eighth and went to war. Blistering exchanges ensued all the way to the end, Cafu perhaps having the edge on volume and accuracy, while Tanaka had the heavier artillery.

The razor-thin split decision went Cafu's way by two scores of 114-113, with a dissenting card to Tanaka by the same margin.

South Africa has a new world champion!

Two other fighters deserve an honorable mention:

Former IBF junior flyweight titleholder Sivenathi Nontshinga hit both a high and a low.

He avenged a knockout defeat and regained his title by stopping Adrian Curiel in the 10th round of a war. Nontshinga did it in come-from-behind fashion, in Mexico, to become a two-time world titleholder.

Sadly, it was not to last. He dropped his belt to former WBC titlist Masamichi Yabuki, who stopped him in nine rounds in Japan.

Junior bantamweight Ricardo Malajika enjoyed a breakout year.

First, he scored a shutout 12-round decision over British and Commonwealth champion Marcel Braithwaite. Malajika boxed masterfully behind his jab, completely negating everything Braithwaite attempted.

He capped that off by knocking out Yanga Sigqibo in the 11th round. Sigqibo had previously gone the 10-round distance with four-weight world champion Kosei Tanaka.

Fight of the Year – Shervantaigh Koopman TKO 5 Brandon Cook

Who doesn't like shootouts?

That is exactly what junior middleweights Shervantaigh Koopman and his Canadian opponent, former world title challenger Brandon Cook, delivered. The fight took place at Emperors Palace in Kempton Park, South Africa, on October 26.

Cook silenced the home crowd by dropping Koopman with a left hook in the first round. Moments later, he scored a second knockdown when Koopman's gloves touched the canvas after eating a right. Koopman seemed to be tottering on the edge of a stoppage but kept his wits about him. In a dramatic turnaround, he nailed Cook with a left hook-right hand combination, the follow-up attack putting the Canadian down.

In the second, Koopman's right opened a bad cut above the left eye of Cook that gushed blood for the rest of the fight. Koopman was gaining ascendency, but Cook kept himself in the running by landing sporadic power shots.

In the third, Koopman dropped Cook again with a right uppercut to the body. Cook got up and was saved by the bell, but Koopman had found the key.

Both went at each other in the fourth, with Koopman getting the better of the exchanges. Cook was taking punishment but landed an overhand right and left hook that kept the crowd on the edge of their seats.

The end came in the fifth. A right uppercut to the body sent Cook down again. He got up, but when a right uppercut to the head sent him stumbling back into a corner, the fight was waved off.

Stoppage of the Year – Kaine Fourie TKO 4 Wasiru Mohammed

In a battle of undefeated lightweights, prospect Kaine Fourie almost found himself a knockout victim at the hands of Wasiru Mohammed from Ghana. A right hook from Mohammed, landed moments after the bell ended the second round, sent him down, badly hurt.

Fourie took a beating in the third but recovered by the fourth.

Suddenly he dropped Mohammed with a beautiful left hook. The Ghanaian got up, but a right hand-left hook combination dumped him, face-first, on the canvas. The fight was waved over without a count.

It was far from a flawless performance by Fourie, but he ended it in spectacular fashion!

Comeback of the Year – Thulani Mbenge

After dropping a close majority decision to Souleymane Cissokho in France in 2022, welterweight Thulani Mbenge sat out the entirety of 2023, unable to get fights.

His career seemed to be going nowhere, but that changed in 2024. He returned, banging out a unanimous 10-round decision over Leandro Ariel Fonseca in a crowd-pleasing slugfest.

Then he journeyed to the U.K. to face awkward southpaw Michael McKinson.

A left hook-right hook-left hook combination from McKinson appeared to buzz Mbenge in the first, but that would be the Brit's best moment.

By the third, Mbenge took over, varying combinations to the head and body, backing McKinson up and simply outworking him. Mbenge's jab and straight right kept finding McKinson's face just as effectively as his left hook found McKinson's body.

McKinson made his last stand in the ninth, letting his hands go, but at the end of the round Mbenge was back in control. He kept his foot on the gas all the way to the final bell.

Mbenge got the nod on all three cards. The scores were 117-111 and 116-112, twice.

Big things are expected in 2025! RING

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can follow him on YouTube at Droeks on Boxing, reach out to him on X @droeksonboxing or email droeks@gmail.com.

شركة جدة الإقتصادية
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Relaunch in Riyadh

Boxing legends and luminaries attended the lavish Ring Magazine relaunch gala in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 19. The star-studded event, which was broadcast live on DAZN and covered by TNT Sports and Sky Sports, celebrated the 102-year-old publication's return to print and its ambitious, soon-to-be-announced plans for 2025. »

Prioritize joy

Connecting the Thrill: How stc Group Powers Riyadh Season

Riyadh Season, the Kingdom's largest entertainment festival, has quickly become a global showcase for entertainment, drawing international attention for its world-class performances and cultural celebrations. stc Group, as the platinum sponsor of Riyadh Season, has played a pivotal role in this transformation.

Currently taking place at the heart of the Kingdom from October 2024 until March 2025, Riyadh has transformed into a global hub of excitement, with the collaboration between Riyadh Season and stc Group illustrating how technological innovation can amplify the impact of these events for everyone.

By deploying AI solutions and expanding its network, stc Group has provided record-breaking 5G connectivity, supporting over 10 million visitors – and counting – since October 2024.

The Group's innovative digital solutions and extensive network enhancements offer visitors a unique and seamless experience, solidifying Riyadh's status as a capital of major events, entertainment, and tourism, and stc Group as the Kingdom's leading digital enabler.

Ringside Thrills and Spectacular Showdowns

As a celebration of culture, innovation and excitement, Riyadh Season also offers unparalleled boxing and professional wrestling events.

Whether it's a high-stakes championship fight or a spectacular wrestling match, Riyadh Season has brought these unique sporting experiences to the forefront of the nation's entertainment scene. Laying the groundwork for these large-scale events is a robust digital infrastructure, which is where stc Group's contribution is so essential.

Driving the success of this event is a crucial enabler: connectivity. As a platinum sponsor of Riyadh Season, stc Group plays a pivotal role in ensuring that fans can stay connected and engaged throughout these unique moments.

stc Group: The Digital Backbone

Driven by the Kingdom's digital transformation and Vision 2030 ambitions, stc Group has positioned itself as a key enabler of this digital evolution. The company offers a comprehensive range of innovative products and solutions that are vital for connecting people within Saudi Arabia and beyond.

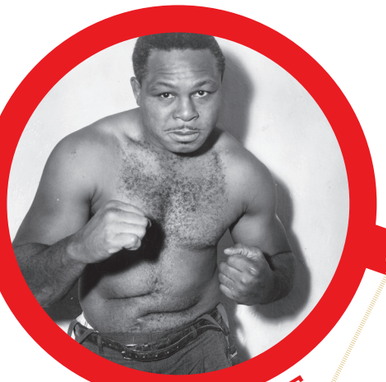
The stc Group stands at the forefront of innovations that enhance the lives of consumers and businesses alike, deploying advanced technologies that are critical to delivering smooth and uninterrupted experiences for fans and event organizers.

The Future of Sports and Entertainment Connectivity

stc Group's sponsorship of Riyadh Season is instrumental in enhancing the fan experience, not just for those attending the live events but for a global audience tuning in from afar. The seamless connectivity provided by the Group is fundamental for live streaming, engaging across social media and real-time updates, helping to create a communal and interactive experience that amplifies the thrill of Riyadh Season.

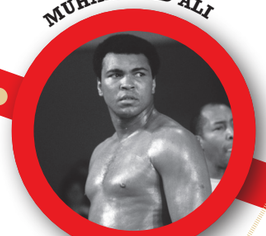
As technology continues to evolve, so too will stc Group's contributions to sports and entertainment. For fans, the future looks brighter, as digital innovations promise even more thrilling and connected experiences. Stay connected, stay engaged, and let the fun continue!

FIGHTLINE



ARCHIE MOORE

ALI TKO 4 MOORE
Nov. 15, 1962

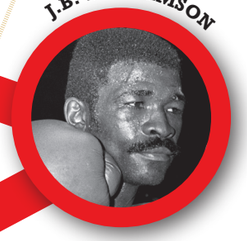


MUHAMMAD ALI

ALI KO 8 FOREMAN
Oct. 30, 1974

GEORGE FOREMAN

FOREMAN TKO 5 WILLIAMSON
April 4, 1989



J.B. WILLIAMSON

WILLIAMSON TKO 6 STEIGER
April 21, 1990

STEIGER DRAW 6 ROBINSON
Aug. 23, 1995

GARY STEIGER

DAVID ROBINSON

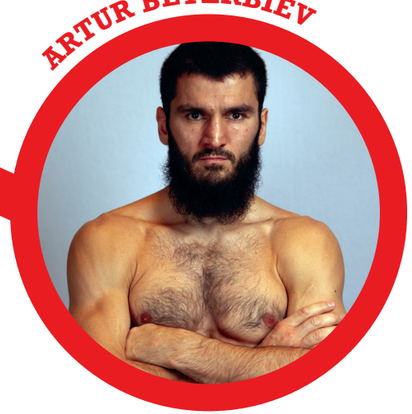
AGNEW KO 1 ROBINSON
Jan. 27, 2011

CEDRIC AGNEW

BIVOL TKO 4 AGNEW
June 16, 2017

DMITRY BIVOL

BETERBIEV MD 12 BIVOL
Oct. 12, 2024



ARTUR BETERBIEV

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face – a young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking Archie Moore, one of the greatest light heavyweights of all time, to Artur Beterbiev, the current undisputed champion at 175 pounds. Have a Fightline you'd like to submit? Send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order.

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